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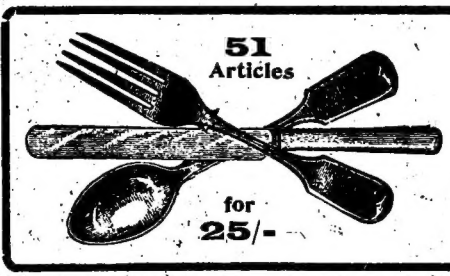

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 700.] For the Week Ending May 31st, 1902. [ONE PENNY.

Our Powerful New Serial.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

Author of "Fettered Lives," "As a Man Sows," "In the Grip of the Law," etc.

If you are a new reader, this summary of the preceding instalments will give you the thread of the story.

JOHN MANSFIELD, a wealthy banker, Esther, his only child, Alec Scarsdale, his confidential clerk, and Seaton Revelle, a gentleman who had made the banker's acquaintance on the Continent, are seated together under the verandah of Mr. Mansfield's house, partaking of afternoon tea.

"It's an extraordinary thing that even in the privacy of one's home one can't get away from business," the banker was remarking. "Only this afternoon an utter stranger called upon me—a bearded, sunburnt fellow, just home from South Africa. . . . and took from round his waist a money-belt stuffed with bank-notes and diamonds, and wanted me to take charge of it. . . . He was so persistent that I agreed to lock the belt in my safe and return it to him on Monday."

The stranger informed the banker that he had made the pile in four years.

"Extraordinary!" said Seaton Revelle, "It will probably take him less than four years to spend it. Easily won, they say, easily lost."

Shortly afterwards Revelle writes a letter to a Benjamin Beard in London, which he posts himself. During his absence, Alec Scarsdale, who is treated by the banker almost as his own son, tells Mr. Mansfield of his love for Esther, and, with tears in his eyes, the old man gives the pair his fondest blessing.

That same evening, Esther and Alec go for a walk in the beautiful woods which are situated close to "The Woodlands," Mr. Mansfield's house. Their loving embraces are watched by Revelle, who silently chuckles as he thinks of the change which will shortly take place as a consequence of this important letter to London.

The next afternoon there is another meeting in the woods. This time between Seaton Revelle and a gentleman from London named Benjamin Beard. A whispered conversation takes place, and a little packet of powder passes into Revelle's possession.

"Half of that, Marquis, is quite sufficient to induce sleep," says Benny. A few more confidences, then, "Ta-ta, Marquis, till to-night." Revelle answers "Till to-night, Benny."

Later in the evening Mr. Mansfield, Scarsdale, and Revelle are seated in the smoking-room, enjoying cigars.

"Alec," said the banker, "it's about time I had my night-cap. Be a good fellow and mix it for me—you know my dose."

Scarsdale mixes drinks for all three.

A few minutes later, Revelle manages to drop some powder into the banker's glass.

"Well, gentlemen," presently remarks the banker, "I don't know how you feel, but I'm feeling remarkably sleepy. I say, Alec, what have you been doing with the whisky? It's left a curious taste in my mouth."

"I don't know. Mine tasted right enough," replied Scarsdale.

"My imagination, perhaps, or else I've over-smoked myself."

Late that night a figure cycles up to "The Woodlands," and waits below the dining-room windows.

Suddenly the window is noiselessly opened. "The old man's sleeping like a log, I've got the key." The voice was Revelle's and his listener Benny. Quietly the two men steal to the safe, unlock it, and extract the belt. Just then, Benny, in his excitement, knocks over a vase, and almost immediately footsteps are heard descending the stairs. An instant later, and Scarsdale, fully dressed, enters the room with a candle. But a tremendous blow from Revelle knocks him senseless.

"Go, Benny, go!" Revelle urges, "ride like the devil, I'm going to raise the alarm—it's my only chance."

To put the key in Scarsdale's hand, and the remaining half of the powder in his waistcoat pocket is the work of a moment. While Revelle is still bending over Scarsdale's prostrate body, the servants rush in, alarmed by Revelle's shouts. "One's escaped, but I've got the other," cries Seaton Revelle.

It was past four o'clock in the morning when Scarsdale was marched to the police-station, Esther alone believing him innocent, although the key and powder were found in his possession.

Next day the crime is the one topic of conversation in the district. In the "Crown and Cushion" no doubt is entertained that Scarsdale is guilty, but where is the other man?

Just then a stranger enters and the landlord eyes him suspiciously and secretly sends for the police. Two stalwart young constables arrive. One of them taps the stranger on the shoulder. The stranger looks up and his eyes sparkle with pleasure.

"Freddie!" he cried. "Well I never! So they've drafted you down here!"

"Uncle!" cried the young constable; then laughed loudly.

"Goodman," he continued, addressing the landlord, "do you know who this suspicious person is? He is Mr. Crump, late Chief Inspector of Scotland Yard!"

It was indeed the genial and able little detective who, now on the retired list, had come down to make a few inquiries for his personal satisfaction, prior to attending the great trial in London.

Meanwhile, a new character appears on the scene. This is police-constable, Tom Jackson, once an employé at Mr. Mansfield's bank, whom Scarsdale had saved from becoming a thief in a moment of temptation. He resolves to do what little he can to redeem his debt of gratitude, so manages to visit Scarsdale in prison, and to convey short notes from Alec to Esther, protesting his innocence, and Esther's answer, swearing that nothing shall shake her love and her belief.

The great trial comes on. Mr. Mansfield and Seaton Revelle are of course present to give evidence. Mr. Crump is also there, a retiring figure in the gallery. Not far from him sits Benny, whose anxiety compells him to come and listen to the evidence. Everything is against Scarsdale. Revelle never falters in his lying evidence. The jury retire, but quickly return and give their verdict as "Guilty." The judge turns to the prisoner and asks him if he has anything to say why sentence should not be passed.

"Only this, my lord, I am innocent. Sooner or later, I believe the truth will come to light, and you will find you have condemned an innocent man. Sooner or later"—and his eyes flashed towards Seaton Revelle—"I believe that those who have tried to ruin me will be brought to justice."

The judge then summed up, concluding with, "Alexander Scarsdale, the sentence of this court is that you be sent to penal servitude for sixteen years!"

There was a burst of applause from the court. Scarsdale turned towards the pitiless sea of faces. Suddenly he fixed his eyes wildly upon a certain spot in the gallery, and pointing to a crouching figure seated there, shrieked, "There, there—that man, that man. Let him speak, let him prove my innocence!"

Almost simultaneously with his action, Crump turned his head sharply round.

CHAPTER VIII. (*continued*).

LIKE some drowning man, who, swept along by an eddying resistless torrent, clutches an overhanging branch, clings to it for a moment with despairing hope, so Scarsdale, seeing that face, had seized upon what seemed a last desperate chance of salvation!

Those in the well of the court, who had swung round and were staring up at the gallery, only saw a white, swaying blurr of human faces; but to Scarsdale that one face stood out distinct, like a thing apart.

Crump's brain had worked like lightning. This was no acting, no effort to produce a cheap effect! Even as he turned his head, he drew an imaginary line from the quivering, accusing finger of the prisoner in the dock to the gallery. It might have been pointed at himself; it certainly seemed to indicate the row in which he was sitting. Swiftly, comprehensively he swept the faces of those around him. If the man were present, unless he were possessed of an almost superhuman power of self-control, he must betray some emotion, some outward sign of shock.

And there was one face, not so very far away from him, that betrayed something more than wonder and astonishment—a clean-shaven, sharp-featured face, a grey tinge of terror upon it! As Crump's brain took an instantaneous, indelible photograph of that face, the man swung round, and scanned the features of those behind him, presenting his back to the prisoner in the dock!

It was all a matter of seconds.

Before Scarsdale could repeat his words, the warders flung themselves upon him. Those in the court who had turned, swung round again and concentrated their gaze on the dock. There was a short, sharp struggle. Scarsdale had gripped the ledge of the dock with one hand. A warder knocked it up. The crowd heard a passionate cry; saw three figures confusedly swaying together; then prisoner and warders disappeared down the steps leading to the passage below.

Never in the annals of the Old Bailey had a sensational trial a more sensational ending than that of Alexander Scarsdale, found guilty of burglary under most aggravated circumstances, and sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

It was all over now!

Seaton Revelle drew in a deep breath, like a man from whose soul a great load had been lifted. The crisis was passed—so he fancied, knowing nothing of a certain homely little man who was wedged tightly away in the gallery. Inwardly he reviled Benny Beard—he knew well enough whose face it was, that Scarsdale had seen—for the criminal folly of having ventured into court. He had expressly given him instructions to keep out of the way for a time. But "All's well that ends well!" The burglary, now that the law had been satisfied, would cease to attract attention. The rival, who had barred the way to a certain ambitious scheme which had taken shape in his brain, was removed. No need now to worry further about Alec Scarsdale. Sixteen years' penal servitude! He smiled softly to himself as he mingled with the throng that was fighting its way out of the court. He found himself rubbing shoulders with John Mansfield. The banker was looking haggard and worn. The strain of that day had been almost unbearable. Esther, feverish and ill with suspense—she had yet to learn the sentence—was awaiting him at Warham. Outside the court, Revelle held out his hand sympathetically.

"It's been a terrible business!" he said.

"My poor girl!" whispered the old man unsteadily. "My poor girl! I dread meeting her! She believes in him still—loves him still!"

"Let's hope," said Revelle, "that time will bring forgetfulness. I can't express my sympathy in words!"

"I shall take Esther away. A change perhaps will help her to forget. You must come and see us when we come back, Revelle!"

Revelle shook his head.

"I'm afraid that Miss Mansfield has not forgiven me my unwilling share in this business!"

"Ah! But you mustn't judge her by what happened the other day. She was not conscious of what she was doing or saying!"

"I wish I could think that!"

Revelle spoke the words with some emotion, and suppressed a sigh.

"I wish," he went on, "that you would express for me to Miss Mansfield how deeply I feel my position. I—I would give all I possess to have been miles away from the place when it all happened. But, as it was, what else could I have done?"

"I will indeed!"

The banker hailed a cab; then again shook hands with Seaton Revelle, *alias* the Marquis.

No sooner had the prisoner disappeared from the dock, than a regular stampede had occurred in the gallery of the court.

It was not so long ago that Crump had told a young constable at Warham that his day was over, that he had permanently retired from business; but the training and habits of a life-time are not easily eradicated. In the days of his active service, his undoubted success had been due not only to remarkable deductive and logical powers and indomitable pluck, but also to a comprehensive knowledge of, and power to gauge, human nature. He took a broad, humane view of life. Years of contact with crime and criminals had not hardened his heart in the slightest, nor dulled his kindly spirit. Sympathy, abstract sympathy, for Esther Mansfield,

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had caused him to take an interest in Scarsdale's case. Here was a young man of good character, in a good position, and engaged to a charming girl! The prosecution had been unable to bring forward any evidence to show that he had been in financial trouble, addicted to gambling or any vice in secret. He had been condemned on direct as well as circumstantial evidence; but the direct evidence depended on one man. Had Crump been in charge of the case, he would have investigated that man's past history very thoroughly—out of fairness to the prisoner; those who had been in charge seemed to have concentrated their efforts solely on proving Scarsdale guilty. The dramatic scene that had closed the trial had impressed Crump immensely. It had been so absolutely spontaneous on Scarsdale's part. Moreover, the sharp-featured, clean-shaven face that Crump had seen, a grey tinge of terror upon it, answered to the description that Scarsdale had given of the man he had seen standing by the open safe.

"I'm going to follow that fellow!" said Crump to himself, forgetting, for the moment, that his day was over, and that he had permanently retired from the business!

Then the stampede!

Benny Beard, nearer the doorway, was out first. As Crump reached the entrance, a woman fainted. The outward flow was checked. Crump found himself jammed in, unable to move. When, ultimately, he did reach the street, the crowd outside had swallowed up the man he wanted.

"Most annoying!" he said to himself, shaking his head. "Of course I may be quite wrong in my assumption that he was the man that Scarsdale indicated, yet of all the faces that I scrutinised, his was the one that exhibited terror—real terror, as contrasted with astonishment and wonder. This affair is beginning to trouble me, trouble me very much indeed!"

He moved away quietly.

"I suppose," he reflected, "that it is a vast piece of impertinence on my part; but, in spite of the verdict of the jury, intelligent men, and the summing-up of the judge, I am beginning to have grave doubts as to Scarsdale's guilt!"

The flesh round his small, keen eyes puckered up, causing innumerable wrinkles to form.

He climbed on to the top of a 'bus. In the Strand he alighted, and made his way to a quiet, old-fashioned family hotel in one of the side streets that lead down to the Embankment. He lingered some time over the tea and toast that he ordered; then, presently, he shook a forefinger at an empty chair opposite.

"I know, my dear fellow, I know! This is absolutely nothing to do with me. I am on the shelf, and far abler men than myself have gone into the case very thoroughly, but, notwithstanding, if I have arrived, rightly or wrongly, at the conclusion that there may have been a grave miscarriage of justice—and I regret to say that it would by no means be the first time that I have known such a grievous thing to happen—would it not be a very selfish, cowardly act on my part, to go back to my delightful little place in the country, deliberately ignoring the dictates of my conscience, while conscience tells me in a very loud voice that it is my duty as a man to go into this matter very thoroughly!"

Crump paused for a few moments as if he were giving the imaginary individual in the chair opposite an opportunity to reply.

"I assure you, my dear fellow, that from a personal, selfish point of view, I infinitely prefer the quiet of the country,

Esther drew in her breath quickly, as she caught sight of his face. It was the face of the photograph!

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the pleasures of my garden, and the society of my good friends, old and young; but a man is under certain unwritten, but sacred obligations to his fellow-creatures!"

Crump paused to fill his tea-cup.

"No, my dear fellow, there you are quite wrong! It isn't conceit on my part or because I fancy that I'm a very clever fellow who knows better than everybody else; but simply because my conscience tells me that, feeling as strongly as I do on this matter, it would be very cowardly on my part to stand by and do nothing! Therefore, I shall go into the matter!"

He sipped his tea.

"Ah, yes, I may be hopelessly wrong—that doesn't make the slightest difference. If I prove myself to have been wrong, nevertheless, I shall have done the right thing!"

He started to fill his pipe.

"And now, having made up my mind, I must begin at the beginning. I shall be visiting Warham again shortly!"

CHAPTER IX.

In which Seaton Revelle Explains his Intentions to Benjamin Beard.

WHEN in London, Seaton Revelle occupied a handsome suite of rooms in Bond Street.

On the same evening that Crump had arrived at his determination, Revelle was lounging in an easy chair before the fire, a cigar between his lips, a whisky and soda at his elbow.

He was reading through an account of the trial in the evening paper, when his manservant—a quiet, noiseless person, with an expressionless face—entered, with the announcement that a gentleman wished to speak to him.

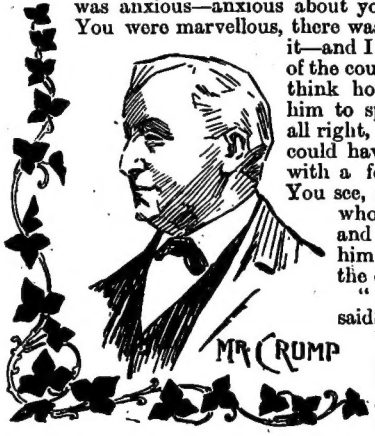
"Show him in, Railton."

A moment later, Mr. Benjamin Beard, neatly dressed, and looking like a man of business, or a well-to-do solicitor, entered the room. But there was a certain look of uneasiness about his ferrety eyes as they fell on Seaton Revelle.

The valet with the expressionless face glided out and closed the door behind him. Seaton Revelle turned sharply in his chair.

"What the deuce do you mean by going to the Old Bailey to-day? Confound it all, I thought you had more common sense."

"I'm sorry, Marquis," replied Benny, humbly; "but I was anxious—anxious about you and your evidence. You were marvellous, there was no picking holes in it—and I was right at the back of the court. Even now I can't think how it was possible for him to spot me. But it was all right, Marquis, though you could have knocked me down with a feather at the time. You see, no one could tell at whom he was pointing, and the warders whipped him pretty smartly out of the dock."



"Look here, Benny," said Seaton Revelle, slowly, "next time you disobey orders, there'll be trouble. I'm not a man of many words, you know what I mean. Now mix yourself a drink, and take a cigar."

Benny, evidently thankful at being let off so lightly, helped himself to the whisky with a sigh of relief.

"And now, Marquis," he said, deferentially, "might I be so bold as to ask your plans. Will you be wanting my services?"

Seaton Revelle contemplated the blue smoke that curled upwards from his cigar.

"I'm going to settle down at Warham presently. There's a nice little place to let there that'll just suit me. I shall take it fairly easy at first. And, now that I'm in funds, I shall be able to indulge in my old hobby!"

His eyes brightened with a light of enthusiasm.

"Ballooning?" questioned Benny.

"Yes!"

"You're a marvel!" ejaculated Benny, "though I'm bothered if I can see where the fascination of it comes in. The very thought of it makes my head swim. No, let me stick down below. *Terra firma's* good enough for me, thank you very much, all the same!"

Revelle threw back his head, and stared up at the ceiling.

"Fascination? My good Benny! To me there's no sensation in the world that can come near it. 'Pon my soul! I sometimes regret the old life. It was deuced risky; but it was worth it!"

The man's eyes were fairly glowing now. He had spoken the last words more to himself than to his companion.

"Marquis," said Benny, looking at him blankly, "what are you talking about?"

"Never mind! I'd gone back into the past before—before I knocked across you, Benny!"

The silence that followed was broken by Benny.

"But I say, Marquis, the funds won't last for ever—specially if you go in for hobbies!"

"I know that, my good fellow; but there are some fine country houses round Warham, and I shall be mixing with the best society, and shall have plenty of opportunity for observation."

"What," whispered Benny, excitedly, and lapsing into the vernacular of the cracksman, "settle down as a country gentleman, hob-nob with the toffs, and then crack their cribs for them!"

"Precisely."

"Marquis," said Benny, rather nervously, "you'll run it too fine one of these days. You're a marvel, I know, but you'll run it too fine!"

Seaton Revelle leant back in his chair and gave a low laugh.

"I don't fail as a rule. However, you needn't get worried just yet. I shan't start yet awhile. In fact, it might not be necessary. I might get married and turn respectable."

"What—what—you marry?"

"Why not? A pretty girl and lots of money, a man might do worse."

And Seaton Revelle gave a peculiar smile that showed his white teeth—a smile not altogether pleasant to witness.

"It isn't the banker's girl, is it, Marquis?" gasped Benny, "the girl who was engaged to the fellow you've put away to-day!"

"You are too inquisitive, friend Benny; wait and see!"

Benny stared blankly at the fire. For some time he puffed away at his cigar in silence. Then, without apparent reason, he suddenly shivered, as if a cold draught of air had struck him.

"I say, Marquis"—there was a slight unsteadiness in his voice—"sixteen years is an awful stretch. When I saw that poor fellow standing, white as death, in the dock, I wished to Heaven we could have managed it without that. I know what prison means, I've done a five stretch myself, and though I'm pretty tough, it nearly broke me." Again he shivered. "If he gets remission of time for good conduct, he'll be out in twelve years. Twelve years of it, and five nearly did for me!"

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There was evidently a draught blowing from somewhere, for Benny drew nearer to the fire, and having poured out half a tumbler of raw spirit, gulped it down.

"I didn't know you were so philanthropic"—Seaton Revelle's manner had changed, and there was a hidden snarl in his voice—"do you want to take his place, then? It might be managed yet."

"Here, Marquis, no larks!" said Benny, as his ferrety eyes dilated with a look of momentary terror, "I know it was him or us, and he had to go, but I'm sorry for him. To a man of his sort, penal servitude's worse than a death sentence. I remember when I was on the Moor, there was a young fellow——"

"Stop that," snapped Seaton Revelle, "I don't want any of your confounded broad-arrow reminiscences."

"All right, Marquis, all right. But you needn't be so short! I say, once I thought the prisoner would clear the dock and get at you. Marquis, if ever Scarsdale comes out, it'll be a bad business if he comes across you or me!"

Seaton Revelle laughed.

"We've got twelve years at least before that happens, Benny. Lots of things may take place before then."

And he stared at the glowing ash of his cigar.

"I'm going down to Warham to-morrow to see about that place. When I'm fixed up you must come and stay with me. But I shan't settle down there just yet; for a while it will be just as well if we don't see too much of one another; give this business time to blow over. In the meantime, Benny, try—er—to cultivate a rather more aristocratic manner. They are a 'touchy' lot down there, and you'll have to live up to them."

Benny bowed his head submissively, and inwardly determined to buy a handbook on etiquette.

"I say, Marquis," he said, after a pause; "where did you pick up that servant of yours? I fancied I'd seen his face before. I don't care much about it. Is he all right?"

"Railton," said Seaton Revelle, slowly, "is as faithful as a dog. And so he ought to be."

"Why?"

"Because," answered Seaton Revelle, "well, I did him a good turn once. Do you remember the Hancaster jewel robbery? It was some years back!"

"Yes, I do," replied Benny, "it was a big business, the mystery of the Dunnavon murder was mixed up with it. Detective Crump—he must have been a smart fellow, Marquis—was on the job. I don't mind owning up that, though I never had any dealings with him, I felt a kind of relief when I read of his retirement. One of the best men The Yard ever had. He left behind him a gap that has never been filled up, I am thankful to say! But go on, Marquis, what about this servant of yours?"

"Well, there was a fellow called Tomlinson who was mixed up in the Hancaster business. He got seven years. When he came out, he managed to get himself into a nasty fix. I pulled him out of the fire. Well, Railton's Tomlinson. But this is entirely between ourselves. He's completely lost his nerve; but he can be very useful sometimes."

Benjamin Beard was conscious of a slight twinge of jealousy.

"Well," he said, a little sullenly, "as you think it advisable to keep clear of one another for a bit, I shall take myself off for a bit of a holiday on the Continong. And you?"

"I shall see about this place at Warham, and then—well, I can't quite say, my movements will depend on circumstances!"

When, after some further conversation, Benny took his departure, Revelle half lay back in his chair, wrapped in deep meditation. He flattered himself that he had made a very favourable impression on John Mansfield. He had an infinite belief in his powers where women were concerned. It would take time, of course, but the banker's only daughter, both for herself and her prospects, was well worth waiting for. His future movements would largely depend on Esther Mansfield's.

But when, presently, he rose and stretched himself, he was not thinking of Esther Mansfield, but another woman.

"I wonder," he muttered thoughtfully, "I wonder what's become of her?"

CHAPTER X.

How Esther Mansfield Made the Acquaintance of Mr. Crump.

SIXTEEN years' penal servitude!

In the wood that overlooked Warham reservoir, on the felled tree on which, but a brief while ago, Alec Scarsdale had sat beside her, whispering of his love, Esther Mansfield now sat alone. Her hands were tightly clasped together, her head bowed. For a long while she did not stir. Then she shivered, and a low moan whispered out from her white lips.

Sixteen years!

Mute, hopeless agony shone from her tearless eyes. And he was innocent. Her heart cried out that he was innocent! Oh, the horror of it all! God willing, when the long years had passed, he should find her waiting for him, her love undimmed—but sixteen years! Could nothing be done? In some way could she not fight for him?

On the morrow she was going away. She rose to her feet mechanically, and cast a last glance round at the scene that recalled so much to her; then turned away wearily, hopelessly.

When she reached the house a maid-servant opened the door. Her face was unfamiliar to Esther. It was a pale face from which a former prettiness seemed to have been washed out. All the blood seemed to have gone from it, and all the life from the eyes. The hair was streaked with grey, though the woman's figure suggested youth.

"Yes, miss?" she said in a tuneless voice.

Then Esther remembered that Mrs. Tilley, the housekeeper, had consulted her about engaging a new parlour-maid.

"Are you—are you Vance?" she questioned.

"Yes, miss. I beg your pardon, but I didn't realise that you were Miss Mansfield!"

And the faded woman with grey hair and lifeless eyes stepped meekly on one side.

"Has Mr. Mansfield returned yet?" asked Esther.

"No, miss, but a person has called and asked to see Mr. Mansfield, and then asked if he could speak with you, miss. He is waiting in the library."

Esther hesitated. She was feeling in no mood to see people, but she bravely told herself that she must not shirk her responsibilities.

"Did he give his name?"

"No, miss."

Esther moved away to the dining-room. The new parlour-maid followed her with her dull, lifeless eyes; then, with a sigh, glided away quietly.

As Esther entered the dining-room, a little grey-haired man, who had been studying with obvious admiration the smooth lawn and the beautifully kept flower-beds upon which the windows looked, turned. Vance, the new parlour-maid, had described him as a person. She had been uncertain in her mind whether the term "gentleman," would have applied. As a matter-of-fact, his rather homely appearance covered a very perfect gentleman. His small eyes rested for a moment on Esther's grief-stained face, and perceptibly softened with a look of sympathy. Then something like an expression of embarrassment crossed the homely face.

"You wished to see me?" said Esther.

"I do, Miss Mansfield, and first of all, I'm going to ask you to forgive me intruding at a—at a painful time like this. I trust that you won't look upon it as a piece of impertinence

on my part, a complete stranger to you, but may I first of all offer you my sincere sympathy ?"

He held out his hand. The words, spoken quietly, had an unmistakably genuine ring. Impulsively Esther took the outstretched hand. There was something comforting in its grip.

"Thank you," she whispered, "thank you !"

"And now," he said, "I am going to tell you why I am here. My name is Crump. At one time I was connected with Scotland Yard, but I have been on the retired list for some time. I was present at Mr. Scarsdale's trial in London, you know !"

Esther drew in a sharp breath. Her white face flushed with a thrill of vague hope. She eagerly scanned the little man's homely face.

"You—you—have found out something, something that points to his innocence ? He is innocent, I know he's innocent !"

Crump coughed.

"Yes," he said quickly, and holding up his hand as if to warn her of the inevitable "but" that was to come, "I have made a little discovery that, to me, points to his innocence ; but—but it is not proof as yet. If I did not believe that there had been a miscarriage of justice, I should not be here now ; but the world asks for more than belief—it wants proof. I am going to do my best to obtain that proof. I am going to ask you, Miss Mansfield, to help me !"

"Do you mean that ?" she whispered, with an almost fierce intensity, "I have longed to be able to do something for his sake !"

Then, with a swift movement, she took one of his hands between her own.

"You have brought me hope. God bless you for that !"

Crump's eyes seemed to lose some of their brightness.

"But," he said very gently, "we shall have to be very, very patient. It must be a long up-hill game for both of us. Now, now, I don't want to discourage, dishearten you ; but we must face facts without shirking !"

"Tell me," whispered Esther, "what you want me to do ? I want to start at once !"

"That's brave of you !" said the little man. "Now, first I am going to ask you to keep quiet on the subject of this visit of mine. I had intended to see your father ; but it is better as it is. In my old days of active service I found it the best policy to keep well in the background. Next I am going to ask you a few questions ; then I should like, if possible, to go over the ground of the burglary—without attracting attention in the household, if you could contrive that for me ; and then I will give you one or two simple instructions for the future. Now, let me see !" he fumbled in a pocket and drew out a leather case, "I suppose you've known Mr. Seaton Revelle for a long time ?"

He asked the question quite casually as he searched for something in his case.

"Nearly three years !"

"Ah !"

"And you made his acquaintance——"

"My father met him abroad."

"Ah ! And now I must ask you a delicate question. Has he ever paid you anything more than the usual attentions that a gentleman would pay a lady ?"

"No !" answered Esther in a low voice.

Crump had taken a photograph from his case.

"You have met several of his personal friends, I suppose ?"

"Yes, at different times."

He handed the photograph to Esther.

"Is that by any chance the likeness of a friend of his ?"

It was an unmounted photograph, on the back of which were pencilled certain facts.

"I don't know the face," answered Esther.

"Ah ! Now, will you look at that face very carefully, Miss Mansfield, and commit it to memory. It may be a matter of importance at some future date. If at any time you should come across the owner of that face, I am going to ask you to let me know at once. Look at it very closely, please !" He smiled softly. "You mustn't mind if I am a little dictatorial, my dear young lady ! The owner of that face is a man of about my own height. His eyes, a grey-blue colour."

Esther stared intently at the photograph. New life seemed to have been infused into her.

"Yes !" she said, "I should recognise it anywhere now !"

"And now," said Crump, "I'm going to set you a very hard task, I fancy. I want you to cultivate the friendship of Mr. Seaton Revelle !"

Esther shuddered.

"You suspect him ?"

"I am very anxious to find out all I can about him," was Crump's diplomatic reply, "I know, I know, it will be hard for you ; but it is very necessary !"

"You *do* suspect him !"

Crump held up his hand.

"Miss Mansfield," he said, "when I was in active service, I was continually getting into trouble through jumping at conclusions. The wretched habit has grown on me. I must be on my guard against it now. I am most anxious to learn all I can about Mr. Seaton Revelle. I must not say more than this !"

He had taken back the photograph, and casually glanced at it himself.

It was a very excellent likeness of Mr. Benjamin Beard. On the morning after Scarsdale's conviction, Crump had paid a visit to his old head-quarters, Scotland Yard, where he was always welcome. After an interview with the Chief, he had spent a considerable time over certain photographic albums containing the likenesses of ladies and gentlemen who had suffered terms of imprisonment at various periods. And among these he had come across the face that he had seen in court the day before—the face that had worn a grey hue of terror when Scarsdale had pointed an accusing finger up at the gallery. The letterpress, in connection with the photograph, stated that Herbert Giles, alias the Tinker, had served five years' penal servitude for burglary, and gave besides certain particulars about height, age, and personal appearance. The discovery had caused Crump to chuckle quietly to himself, a sure sign of satisfaction on his part.

He returned the photograph to his case, and took out a card.

"That address will always find me, Miss Mansfield. Let me give it to you now before I forget. You will notice that the name on the card is 'Penworthy,' and in the corner, 'Horticultural Specialist and Landscape Gardener' Unfortunately, in a case like this, in trying to get at the truth, one frequently has to practise deception—or perhaps 'act' were the better word. If any questions should be asked about the object of this visit of mine, you would explain that I called to see whether I could obtain any work here in my capacity of landscape-gardener. In fact, it is just possible that, one of these days, I shall ask you to give me a recommendation."

The little man's eyes twinkled.

"And though, at the present moment, you may have no work to give me, I should be greatly obliged if you would show me over the grounds of this beautiful place ; but, though it has nothing to do with landscape-gardening, I should like to see the interior of the house first !"

"Come !" said Esther.

She led the way from the dining-room. Her father was away in London. Crump made a very careful examination of the study, and the exterior of the safe. Then he requested to be shown the bedrooms occupied by Seaton Revelle and

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Scarsdale on the night of the burglary. This done, he passed out with Esther into the grounds.

"H'm, yes!" he said, having seen all that there was to be seen, "thank you very much, very much indeed. Now, you have that address of mine, Miss Mansfield?"

"Yes; but I am going away to-morrow. Let me give you mine."

Crump pencilled down the name of a hotel at a watering-place on the south coast.

"I shall probably be writing to you in the course of a few days. And now I am going to wish you good-bye for the present. I am an old fellow, Miss Mansfield—I've knocked about the world a good deal, and you won't mind me giving you a little piece of advice. Don't let yourself despair! Show a brave face to the world. I know, I know, my dear child—forgive me; but I'm quite old enough to be your father; I know it's very hard; but you will try, won't you?"

He looked at her almost wistfully out of his small grey eyes. The words had been spoken very quietly, and with a simple tenderness that was truly affecting. They had reached the gate opening out into the road. Crump held out his hand.

"We are going to work very hard—you and I," he said. "I trust—I will go so far as to say that I believe we shall be successful ultimately, but we must be very, very patient!"

He wrung her hand warmly, then raised his hat, with a quaint, old-world bow, and before Esther could find words to express her gratitude he was moving away down the road towards the village; but presently he turned, and nodded his head with a cheery, hopeful smile.

"Dear me," he said, half-aloud, a little later, "it's a sad, heart-achey sort of business, this; but there is one consolation—we have made a start, and"—he rubbed his hands together and chuckled softly—"and, taking all things into consideration, not half a bad start either; but I am afraid it's going to be a long business. The world will not believe Alec Scarsdale innocent until we have brought home the guilt conclusively to someone else, and that will take an enormous amount of doing. It never occurred to me at the time, but it's an unfortunate thing that that young rascal, Freddie, made known my real identity at the Crown and Cushion. It rather hampers me. I don't want it to get about that I have been seen pottering about in the neighbourhood. Well, well, it's remarkable what a difference a beard and moustache make to some people's appearance!"

He chuckled again.

"I must confess that I am rather pleased with the idea of Penworthy, horticultural specialist, and landscape gardener!"

He gave a little sigh.

"And that is what I should have been if I could only have my time over again!"

CHAPTER XI.

Penal Servitude!—The Face of the Photograph.

The sickly light of dawn scarcely seemed to penetrate the thick mist that, like a gloomy shroud, hung round the grim, solitary building that loomed out through the greyness like a dark blot. And even the jangling prison bell, as it summoned five hundred human beings, held in the merciless grip of the law, from their narrow bed boards, even the jangling bell had a muffled, death-like note, as if the mist had wrapped itself round the clapper, and had robbed the metal of its resonance. And, as if not content with enshrouding the prison and muffling the bell, the damp mist crawled into the very cells, to deepen the gloom of the poor wretches within.

Year in, year out, in winter and summer, every morning that jangling bell rouses the sleeper, or tells the wakeful one that night is past, that another weary day of labour, of monotony, of degradation is dawning, and must be lived through. And many a man who has passed through the horrors of prison existence to freedom and life again, will start from his bed at a quarter to six as the fancied jangle of that bell rings in his ears.

The jangling bell had awakened convict No. 35 T from dreams of freedom, of sunshine, of a sweet pure face, with shining eyes, to the hopelessness of a prison cell. In the semi-darkness he wearily rose from the hard bed with its scanty and not over-clean coverings, to begin the degradation of the day by putting on the ill-fitting, hideous prison dress, with its grim decoration of broad arrows.

Those ladies and gentlemen who, not a year back, when they deposited their money at Mansfield's Bank, used to have an occasional chat with the handsome young cashier, would have found it hard to believe that Alec Scarsdale and the gaunt convict No. 35 T, with his close-cropped hair, stubby beard, and haggard features, were one and the same man.

After being sentenced at the Old Bailey, Alec Scarsdale had been sent to serve the first nine months of his sentence at a reception convict prison in the near vicinity of London. During these first nine months a prisoner is known as "a separate." Close confinement, no intercourse except with gaoler, doctor, or governor, hard labour, hard bed, and just sufficient food, roughly represent the first nine months of convict existence. At the end of that period, Scarsdale had been drafted to a "Public works" prison where the convicts were made to labour at brick-making, quarrying, and fortress-building.

Sometimes during that first terrible period, Scarsdale had fancied that his reason would give way. Time, instead of soothing, only seemed to intensify his mental agony. For the first week, he had scarcely slept at all. Night after night, he had paced to and fro his dark cell, living through the past, or feverishly thinking of the hopelessness of the future. Sometimes he would stop his tramping, and the silence would be broken by the sound of grinding teeth and deep breathing as his lips moved in a silent prayer for revenge—revenge on the man who had so irreparably wronged him, who had dashed the cup of happiness from his lips. More than once the warder on night duty, as he patrolled the corridor in his felted shoes—"sneaks" is the prison-term for them—had heard a woman's name—"Esther" he fancied—hoarsely murmured.

Scarsdale was of an impulsive, vehement nature, but it must not be thought that he was lacking in self-control. It is not the single drop, but the continual dropping of water that wears away a stone. If Scarsdale sometimes broke down it was under the pressure of accumulated despair.

Escape—was it possible? Scarsdale thought of the sentries, the signalmen, the patrol, of the thousand-and-one precautions. And yet men had escaped. His heart throbbed fiercely as for a brief instant he suffered his imagination to run riot, and a wild thought flashed through his brain. If he could escape, and could keep clear of the law's clutches, if he had time, he might yet find the man whose face was imperishably stamped on his memory, the man he had seen standing by the open safe; the man he had caught a glimpse of that day, at the Old Bailey, when he had been torn from the prison dock. He tried to dismiss the thought from him as mad and impossible. But all through the weary night it had kept him awake with haunting pertinacity.

Escape, escape, escape—the word seemed to ring in his ears. He found himself recalling stories of marvellous escapes he had read of as a boy. The very bell seemed to clang out "Escape!" with such a deafening persistency that he was almost fain to thrust his fingers in his ears to deaden the sound.

Escape!

And to Esther Mansfield, the leaden, dragging months had been as full of torture. The heartache was none the less because she presented a brave face to the world. Nearly

a year had passed since she had left Warham, since her meeting with Crump. After a stay on the English coast, her father had taken her abroad. She had written to, and received letters from Crump—kindly, sympathetic letters that preached the gospel of patience and hope; but the little man was only human. He had been, and was working, quietly and patiently; but he had been unable to trace Herbert Giles, *alias* the Tinker. Benjamin Beard had left the country for a while, and flying from one place to another, was spending money and a having lively time on the Continent. Yet the little man was mildly hopeful. A letter from Esther, written from the South of France, told him that Seaton Revelle had arrived on the scene, and was staying at the same hotel. Crump had also learnt that Revelle had rented a certain desirable residence at Warham, not far from Mr. Mansfield's house, and intended shortly to take up his quarters there, and Crump had jumped at the conclusion as to the nature of the game that Mr. Revelle meditated playing. And then another letter had reached him from Esther, saying that Revelle had left for England, and that Esther and her father were returning themselves shortly.

It was a grey November day when a London train steamed into Warham station. Seaton Revelle, already established in his new quarters, stood on the platform, a cigar between his teeth. He moved towards a dapper little man, who, carrying a Gladstone bag, alighted from a first-class carriage.

"Hullo, Faversham, here you are! Glad to see you. Come along. I've got the trap waiting!"

They were on the point of leaving the station, when Revelle caught sight of two familiar figures leaving another carriage.

"One moment, Faversham, some old friends of mine!"

The old friends were John Mansfield and Esther.

Time had added to the whiteness of the banker's hair; his shoulders were more stooping. And Esther had changed. The glad light of unburdened youth no longer shone from the hazel eyes; but in its place the wistful look of one who had, and was still, suffering. But the chastening hand of grief, that had transformed the light-hearted girl into a woman, instead of ravaging, had added to her beauty an indescribable, if pathetic, charm.

No twinge of remorse seemed to pluck at his conscience as, with out-stretched hands and mellow voice, Seaton Revelle welcomed back the travellers. Esther's eyes momentarily dilated with a look of unconquerable loathing, and, with a little shiver, she shrank back. Then, crushing back her feelings with a great effort, she took the proffered hand. She had a part to play now—a part that would wear and strain heart and nerve alike—and she must play it. A part in the thrilling drama of life! Where the light was the light of day, and the darkness the darkness of night; where the emotions of joy and pain were real; where the audience cheered the villain, and hooted the hero. And Heaven only knew whether right or wrong would avail when the bell should ring for the curtain to descend.

It was an icy hand that Seaton Revelle inclosed in his cool, clean grip. But his touch seemed to infuse a molten stream into her veins, and two hectic spots blazed out on Esther's pale cheeks. It was the hand that had struck down Alec Scarsdale; the hand that, when he stood in the witness-box, had raised the Testament—"the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me, God!"—to his lying lips.

She had her part to play. In a low voice she thanked him for his inquiries, and when John Mansfield, after a friendly interchange of greetings, invited Seaton Revelle to dine with him a few days later, Esther seconded the invitation.

Then Revelle turned and beckoned to his friend.

"Miss Mansfield, may I introduce an old friend of mine, Mr. Faversham!"

Mr. Faversham raised his hat politely

Esther drew in her breath quickly, as she caught sight of his face.

It was the face of the photograph—the photograph that Crump had shown her nearly a year ago!

(To be continued.)

(The incident illustrated on the cover of this number is dealt with in next week's instalment.)

Quite a Prosaic Affair.

How Jim Loved and Very Nearly Lost.

It was "Steady's" evening to call, but even the best "Steady" in the world grows to be an old story when he comes with clock-like regularity at half-past 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday of every week. So "Steady's" girl, who worked for a living and firmly believed in womanly independence, often read the daily paper aloud in lieu of other entertainment or when conversation flagged, for both had passed the age (or is it only a stage?) of thrills, blushes, tender glances and expressive pauses. In fact, 'twas understood definitely to be only a modern platonic friendship.

"Steady" wasn't a literary chap either, but anything the "Object" read seemed music to his ears and he was, day by day, learning to appreciate the true value of newspapers.

The "Object's" name was Alice, but the "Steady" himself was blessed with the unromantic and thoroughly respectable appellation of Jim. Had fates made it Harold or Gerald, perhaps the "Object" would have devoted less time to the daily news.

This evening there had been an unromantic pause for fully five minutes, when Jim exclaimed: "Why can't you read out loud? I can't even see your face through that blanket sheet." A remark which, under the circumstances, seemed a trifle unplatonic.

"Oh, well, you never could see through anything," laughed Alice. "But, if you care to know, I'll tell you. I was reading of the Yorkshire clergyman who preached a sermon on the seven meanest men in Yorkshire."

"Poor sinners! How they must have felt!"

"Of course, they weren't present. Anyway, the sermon was impersonal. He simply selected seven of the meanest traits in men."

"Well, lets hear the parson's list."

"Please be a little more devout in your remarks. What do you think is the worst trait in man?"

"A man who abuses his wife."

"Oh, of course, but every man isn't blessed with a wife.

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Select something general that will apply to bachelors, benedicts and widowers. Now, to me, deceitfulness seems the most objectionable, I think."

"You, being a woman, can undoubtedly judge that trait more truly than man."

Alice suddenly dropped the offending screen and surveyed Jim in half amazement, not quite knowing whether the remark was a veiled insinuation or stumbled upon by chance.

"You speak as if you had had experience, Jim. Have you ever loved and lost?"

"I have only loved, never lost."

"Then you are as yet a very incomplete, imperfect man. It was too bad you were successful the first time. That is sure to make a man conceited."

"I did not say I was successful. But your remarks are very sweeping and authoritative."

"They are based on observation only. Having never experienced the cause, of course, I could not feel the effect. Having never loved, how could I lose? And how could I love a man who deceived me even in a small matter. Suppose I asked you up Sunday afternoon and you promised in good faith to come, but nevertheless, you failed to appear, and later sent me a note saying that you were unavoidably detained. Afterwards I discover that you spent the afternoon with Nellie B. instead. Wouldn't that make me distrust you ever after? Of course this is only an example in social life, but 'twould be even worse in business affairs. Men are becoming so womanish. They can't answer decisively. They have outgrown the point-blank reply in acquiring the habit of giving an affirmative couched in doubt or a negative bolstered with hopes. They seem to be aping French courtiers of last century."

"You're becoming too intense, Alice. Relax your feelings or you'll reach an inglorious climax. Take some bon-bons" (a "Steady" may bring bon-bons if the "Object" is fully aware of his platonic state) "and let's hear the other traits discovered by the Yorkshire parson."

"These are good (the bon-bons). Let's see. Second, the stingy man. Yes, women will all agree there. Some of those goody-goody men, who seem all but angels in their church environments, squeeze a penny until they blush in real life."

"Pennies—new ones—are red anyway——"

"I mean the man blushes, you stupid. Grows red in the face, if that suits you better. Still, the stingy man is to be pitied. I believe he really suffers in parting with the filthy lucre. I don't believe you're stingy, are you?"

"You wouldn't have a man testify against himself, would you?"

"Oh, but you aren't guilty, I am sure, or I should have discovered it long ago. My first admirer was affected with the malady and allowed me to pay for my own tea when he escorted me to a church bazaar. Wasn't that a romantic beginning for love's young dream?"

"The brute! But continue."

"Next comes cowardice. Everyone hates a coward. They are classified into three classes—moral, mental and physical cowards. Then comes the conceited, don't-touch me, I-am-better-than-you-are man. The prig, I should call him. The liar looms up prominently among the seven, and last, but not least, are the selfish man and the scandal-monger."

"Now, let's have the list, complete?"

"The conceited coxcomb, the miser, the deceiver, the liar, the coward, the scandal-monger and the selfish man."

"Rather a dubious lay-out, isn't it?"

"You speak of it as if it was a menu."

"Don't try sarcasm on me, Alice. Tell me, honestly, instead, have I any of these traits in a dangerously developed state?"

"No-o, I don't think so. Why?"

"Then I'm not such a bad fellow after all, am I?"

"Oh, no, You're just comfortable. Neither shockingly bad nor alarmingly good."

"Just the kind of fellow you'd like to spend the rest of your life with, Alice?"

"Well, if I were to die young I might think about it, but I've been told that I'm to reach a ripe old age, so I really couldn't consider the matter."

"You are in earnest?"

"Ye-es. Well, I might think about it. But, really, Jim, I never had any of that grand passion of which I have read. When you were absent last winter I slept and ate with unexpected regularity and felt no pangs of despair. You never told me that life would be a dreary blank without me nor wrote me fervid love epistles. Thinking it all over, I'm sure this is not a case of real love. And if you make another careful diagnosis you, too, will discover that it's only friendship."

"I told you once to-night that I had loved, but never lost, but now I also know the sorrow of losing. I know you think me a stoical, unfeeling chap, but, Alice, you are everything to me. I can't express this in poetical or flowery language, for its sincerity is too deep for that, even were I able. Now give me your hand, for it's farewell."

"Why, Jim! I shall miss you. Really, you are too serious about this matter. We'll forget it in a day or two and go back to the old way."

"Never! I'm not a child. Good-bye!"

* * * * *

Jim kept his resolve and Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday evenings often seemed very lonely to Alice even though she tried to make herself believe that her work absorbed her whole attention.

One day, when returning from her work, she met Jim and Nellie B., both seemingly in the best of humour. Indeed, Jim looked anything but a forsaken lover. Somehow the thought that Jim didn't care and was absolutely happy in another's company, seemed peculiarly unwelcome. She tried to shake it off, but in spite of her efforts, life had suddenly grown dreary. Several days in succession she met the couple, always laughing and chatting gaily.

One night after her daily encounter she made a resolve and hastily sat down at her writing desk and wrote the following brief note:

"Dear Jim.—The Yorkshire clergyman overlooked one of the objectionable traits in men. I have recently made a discovery of my own.

"Alice."

Of course this note brought Jim, as she hoped that it would. In fact, he came the very next evening. And when he insisted on further explanation, Alice only told him to guess.

"But, really, I can't. I thought seven cardinal vices were bad enough, but here you discover the eighth. Now, what is it? I am really anxious to know."

"Well, it's the obtuse man who always takes a woman at her word."

"Alice, do you mean you really cared?"

"Haven't I lost six pounds in weight and any amount of sleep since you went away?"

"And now may I come back, not platonically as you used to say, but as a real lover, even if a trifle practical and moderate?"

"Yes, Jim, as a lover whom I almost had to lose before I learnt to appreciate his true worth."

H. C. L.

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The Dentist's Love Story.

The Narrative of a Double Partnership.

"It would not be correct to say that I loved Miss Baker 'at first sight,' which was nearly half a year ago; for Mrs. Tucker was then living—a beautiful character, with apparently every prospect of long and happy years before her; then gone in a minute, as you might say, like—like a soft filling, leaving only an aching cavity where it had once bloomed. But if I did not love Miss Baker I was interested in her as I never had been in a patient before; interested professionally. You don't know her? No; perhaps it is better you shouldn't, for your own peace of mind, sir. Wait a minute and I will show you something."

Dr. Tucker disappeared in the little workshop adjoining his operating room, and presently returned with a triumphant smile and a set of false teeth.

"I want you to look at this," he said, as he pushed me gently back in the chair and again gagged me with the rubber apron. "You see, of course, what it is, but perhaps only a professional man can appreciate its full beauty. There they lie, like gems in a casket; thirty-two of them, and every one flawless. Now, you will hardly believe me, but I must ask you to take my word for it, when I say that these teeth, made by the best artists in the world, aren't one bit finer, stronger, more regular or better formed than the glorious set with which nature has endowed Miss Baker. And when it comes to beauty, gloss and what you would call 'expression,' bless you, sir, these are nowhere beside the simple handiwork of nature. It is marvellous what nature can do when she sets about it.

"Well, you may guess what a joy it was to me to be called upon once or twice a month to go over those teeth of Miss Baker's one by one, lingering fondly over each, watching anxiously lest there might be the first symptoms of decay, rejoicing when I ever found them sound and brilliant and spotless as pearls. There was a time, after my second sad bereavement, a period of ten days, during which I never once entered my studio. When at last I did return, I found a note from Miss Baker, asking me to give her an appointment, as she did not like, she said, 'to go to a stranger.'

"'What did it mean?' I asked myself, with beating heart. At least it meant what it said—I was not a 'stranger' to her. Of course, I was not foolish enough to misunderstand the object of her request. It was strictly professional; yet I could not help indulging in a wild hope that a time might come when—— And I could wait. The world was all before us, comparatively speaking; for Miss Baker was in the prime of her youthful beauty, and our united ages would not exceed three score and ten, which is the limit allotted to even a single individual, I believe.

"I wrote at once, appointing the following Thursday (it was then Friday) for her visit. I had hope, but alas, I had not the confidence to hasten the day which should forever determine my fate for good or ill.

"The day came, and so did she. I had studied beforehand how I should press my suit, delicately, eloquently as I knew how, but frankly and openly, as I had always done in such cases, I am proud to say.

"But who can foresee even an hour ahead? When Miss Baker came at the appointed hour, 2.25 p.m., her beautiful face was muffled in a handkerchief, what was visible of it being drawn with anguish. I hastened to greet her and ask the question of which my instincts too truly anticipated the answer. She had the toothache. A brief examination confirmed the terrible announcement. It was the little rift within the lute, the flaw in the diamond, the speck on the ripe fruit. And yet, so strange is the heart of man, I almost rejoiced to know that even that peerless set was subject to mortal decay. It would henceforth be my melancholy pleasure to be its and her champion against the insidious enemy, to guard the pearly portals of her beauty, against the ravages of decay.

"To my unbounded surprise, she refused all my offers to save the stricken tooth—it was the second molar in the left lower jaw, a noble specimen, barely touched by the frost of disease. I told her how easy would be the work, how almost painless the process, how fatal the mistake of removing it. She was inflexible, deaf to all my prayers, almost childishly unnerved by the pain which she was enduring and had already endured.

"'I hate it!' she said, 'for it hurts me, and I wish it drawn at once, do you understand? At once! Take it out and——burn it! I never want to see or feel it again.'

"This, of course, was irrational and even ridiculous; but when she finally declared that if I did not obey her orders she would go to somebody who would, I simply had to comply. With what feelings you may imagine.

"She would not take ether or gas. She said she was not afraid and that was enough. I then explained to her the method of deadening suffering by the use of cocaine locally applied. She seemed pleased with the idea, and I prepared for the painful duty with such feelings as an artist might experience if ordered to destroy the picture which had cost the labour and enthusiasm of years to paint. For I loved Miss Baker's teeth, every one of them, perhaps more than I did herself.

"She sat in the chair where you now sit, while I arranged, with trembling hands, for the cruel sacrifice.

"At last all was ready. But when the moment came I simply could not do it. I gazed at the doomed molar, and never before had I seen a tooth which seemed to plead in such dumb eloquence for its life. I could not go on.

"Flinging away the cruel weapon, I fell on my knees beside the chair, and in an uncontrollable burst of passion pleaded for the tooth and myself. I told the whole story of my love. I spoke of the strength and purity and beauty of the molar. In my excitement it is possible that I confounded professional instinct with personal devotion. I was no longer master of my words or thoughts. I must have been eloquent, for at last I saw that she was moved. She shook with suppressed emotion, and smiled on me for the first time since she had entered the office.

"'You are very kind, Dr. Tucker,' she said, 'but all that you say is useless, and some of it I do not understand. I came here to have a tooth drawn. Will you kindly do as I have desired, or let me go elsewhere. It will be time enough to speak of other matters afterwards.'

"What did she mean? Was it possible that——? No matter, I would do her bidding and extract the fated molar though, as Tennyson says, 'though my heart be at the root.' I was intoxicated, blinded, with mingled love, hope, wonder, excitement, as I leant over the chair, and, turning my eyes away involuntarily, applied the fatal forceps.

* * * * *

"She did not shriek, nor faint, nor falter, though a spasm of pain convulsed her beautiful features for an instant. As for me, I was grief-stricken at the needless sacrifice, but upborne by the consciousness of duty done.

"'There,' I exclaimed, holding aloft the proof of my self-sacrifice, 'I have obeyed you at a cost to my feelings which you can never comprehend. I have no desire to display my superior judgment, for, as you know too well, dear Miss Baker (I was

very sorry here that I had never learnt her first name, for it is a little disconcerting to have to make an impassioned address to the object of your devotion as 'dear Miss' anything), but if you will be kind enough to examine this molar you will see that the little trouble which has given you so much pain and impelled you to this great sacrifice could have been remedied without so heavy a cost.'

"'I don't want to see it,' she cried, turning away her head; 'I hate it. Take it away and burn it, I say.'

"But, conscious of rectitude, and anxious—perhaps over-anxious—to show my superior judgment, I continued:

"'Pardon me, but I really must request that you notice, if only for an instant, that the decay at the base of the tooth is merely superficial. I will point it out with the end of the probe. It is just there—'

"And then, if you will believe me, when I turned the tooth to the light to locate the spot exactly, I could not find a speck or shadow of decay anywhere. I could hardly believe my eyes, so I put on my glasses, with trembling fingers, and then—then, for the first time I discovered my fatal error.

"I actually shrieked aloud in my remorse and horror—for I had drawn the wrong tooth!

"She saw it in my face, I think, for she simply set her teeth firmly, and in icy tones asked:

"'Will you be kind enough, Mr. Tucker, to tell me what you have done now?'

"What could I say? What would you have said under the circumstances? I tried to explain. I implored her forgiveness. I told her that I would procure the finest artificial tooth on the habitable globe, to repair my terrible mistake.

"She rose from the chair, and went into the retiring room without a word, and presently came back with her hat and cloak on.

"Then drawing herself up to her full height, and surveying me from head to foot, she said:

"'If I understand you aright, you have made me a flattering offer of the gifted hand which has just disfigured my mouth. If it were possible for one to be insulted by an inferior, you have done your best to insult me. You have only succeeded in inflicting physical injury, for which I shall take care to have you suitably punished.'

"Then, by Jove, sir, she walked out, slamming the door after her. If I had felt like following her, I need not have opened it—I was small enough to go through the key-hole.

"'What happened afterwards?' you ask. Nothing happened afterwards. There hasn't been any afterwards yet worth mentioning. This is Thursday, isn't it? Well, that is the Thursday I spoke of in the beginning.' The lady you met on the stairs is Miss Baker. What will happen I don't know. I don't intend waiting to find out, either. I have had enough of life here. Don't stir, sir. I am going to finish filling that cavity to-night, if I am ever to fill it. To-morrow you won't find any Dr. Tucker, no matter if every tooth in your head was afire, as I hope they aren't going to be."

So ended the dentist's story.

There was an item in the papers of the following afternoon about the "Mysterious disappearance of a well-known dentist in Bond Street," concerning which "further revelations" would appear later.

They never appeared; but in their stead I saw a card stating that:

"Dr. George W. Tucker, late of Bond Street, has formed a co-partnership with Dr. A. J. Bibb of Manchester. Office hours 9 to 6."

That was all, save that a week or two later I read in a Manchester paper that "Dr. George W. Tucker, the well-known dentist of Broad Street, is about to lead to the altar Georgiana Wilhelmina Annabella, the eldest daughter of Dr. A. J. Bibb of this city." **John Parker.**

THE FEAT OF LITTLE ELLEN.

How a Plucky Girl Saved her Husband from Death.

Everybody said when the Darcys adopted her that they were mad—hopelessly mad.

She was the child of some circus people; her father had been killed by a fall from a trapeze, and her mother, ill at the time, had died from the shock. She herself had appeared many times in the ring; she had acted on the trapeze, had walked the tight-rope high above people's heads and had been cheered to the echo when she rode the wonderful horses.

The manager felt that she might easily become the world's most famous bare-backed rider and get her picture put up in every village in the country, but then he realised that there were loftier ambitions than that, and when Dr. Darcy offered to take the child and provide for her, he didn't hesitate about giving her up.

And that's how "Little Ellen" was lost to James Simpson's Ten Big Shows. She grew up in a quiet little Canadian town without doing anything more scandalous than yielding to a very natural desire to astonish her playmates by performances on the clothes-line, in the back-yard, or on the rafters in the old-fashioned barn, or on the high garden fence. She was dearly beloved by the good old doctor and his wife, and at eighteen might have passed for the daughter of an earl. It was then that Philip Rogers came home from college, saw her, and fell in love with her. And then it was that everybody said he was mad — hopelessly mad. She was pretty, she was well educated, she was lovable, she was altogether charming, but the daughter of circus people—and such people!

But because she was the one woman in the world for the young heir, he married her and took her to a golden Paradise in the Cariboo mountains.

Right away there in the heart of the most wonderful scenery, lie the marvellously rich "Forget-me-not" gold mines, called now, however, by the name of "Little Ellen." The name was changed after the big strike, and this is how it happened:

Philip represented his father's large interests there and when the strike came on, as the embodiment of capital, labour put his name on the fated lists and he was set apart from the first. He and Ellen had been at the mines but a year, and the union men looked on him quite as a tenderfoot, who ought to be easily managed. But at the end of the first week of the strike, they found that they were dealing with a man whose courage was commensurate with his strength, whom neither threats nor bribes could influence.

Rumours came of the massacre not far off, and the butchery of the women and children, but it was not until the

day of the riot that Ellen heard of the troubles hanging over the "Forget-me-not."

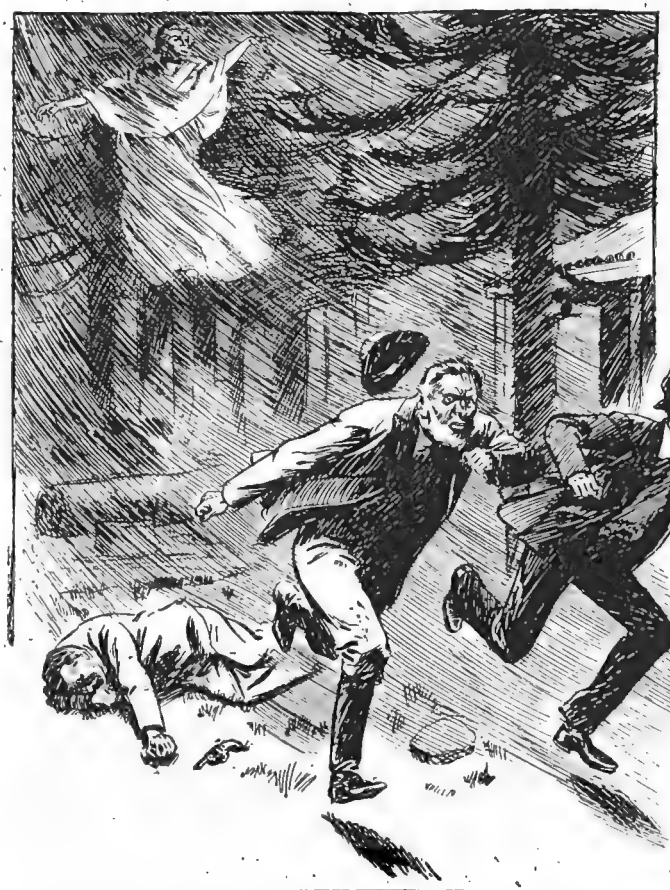
"Phil!" she cried. "Here have I been singing about the house and you have been—" She broke off, too white for tears.

"You shall go on singing, dearest!" he answered, but they sat hand-in-hand in silence. Was there no note of warning in the music of the pines?

All was quiet in the valley below, but Ellen's heart misgave her. As for Philip, he knew that it was the calm before the storm, for to-morrow at nine, George Moriarty, the leader of the strikers, and Philip Rogers, the representative of the company, were to confer together. There were breakers ahead, and reefs and rocks, but the whirlpool which was waiting to engulf him he could not see.

By the request of the strikers, the conference was postponed until the afternoon, and it was not until after sunset that Philip and Moriarty met in the latter's one-room cabin.

Within reach of Moriarty's voice were 400 union men—Philip looked out at a light up on the hillside and remembered that there was none, save himself, to help her. Therefore he was reasoning most patiently and earnestly. Heavens! what is this? A flash, a terrific explosion; Moriarty was lying in a heap before him. Bloodstains were on his clothes, and a smoking revolver at his feet! It was Philip's voice that called the strikers, and when they came—God save any man from such a moment! It was in vain that Philip declared that the shot had been fired from outside—it availed nothing. A rope round his neck and death on the nearest tree within five minutes!



A vivid flash revealed the white figure swaying fifteen feet in the air with its light beard, its haggard face, its shaggy hair.

The next man in authority to Moriarty stopped them—his was a plan of more exquisite suffering. It was decreed that their prisoner was to keep watch alone all night over the dead body, the rude cabin being guarded on the outside by a dozen of their number, and the next day he was to hang over a slow fire, kindled on Moriarty's grave.

They agreed and finally withdrew, and that night the mountains echoed to such shouts of carousals as the "Forget-me-not" had never heard before. Philip sat alone with the dead, watching through the single window the light on the hillside. He looked at it with an unfaltering eye, though he knew that six cruel guns were pointed at that window and six at the opposite door. Who committed the cowardly deed for which he was to pay the penalty he never knew. What wrong was avenged, what crime was atoned for by Moriarty's death he never discovered. Indeed, so well did the assassin lay his plans that he was never detected.

Meantime the news had been broken to Ellen in the most brutal way. Two hours after the killing, Hamilton, the new leader, was told that the wife of the prisoner wished to see him and Ellen was led in to hear coarse jests, receive gross insults, and suffer what was almost death to a tenderly nurtured woman. She asked for only five minutes, and, as she knelt in the agony of her soul, her helplessness and beauty kindled a momentary warmth in Hamilton's heart.

"Let her see him for five minutes, boys." Then gruffly: "Five minutes, remember, and watch the interview."

How could one little woman thwart the purpose of 400 men?

The most poignant moment of Philip's trial came when he saw Ellen led away. It was maddening to think of what might be in store for her. But he preserved his calm, dignified mien, sat down by the lamp, took some letters from his pocket and began to read. His captors looked at him curiously. As Philip read his heart stood still within him, for these were the words: "When you hear the whip-poor-will come to the window. The second call blow out the light. The coast will be clear—you must escape, dear. Run to the little gulch—for my sake!"

It had come to him by Ellen's hand and the reading of it threw him into the most horrible doubts. It would be worse than folly.

Suddenly there came the whip-poor-will's call. He was at the window in a quarter of a second. In the weird light he saw a figure in white, in mid air, coming slowly towards the cabin. Then came a bright flash of lightning, and he saw one of the guards fall prone to the earth and three rush headlong towards the valley. As the remainder of the guard ran round the house, a vivid flash revealed the white figure swaying fifteen feet in the air with its light beard, its haggard face, its shaggy hair! Moriarty's ghost! The men made a simultaneous dash for the shelter of the cabin.

At that moment the storm burst over the "Forget-me-not."

Every newspaper told how the lovers fled away into the storm and all the west rang with admiration of Ellen's daring exploit. She attacked the great weakness of the enemy—superstition—and as Moriarty's ghost she conquered. The rope on which she walked was one of wire stretched from the trestle of an ore track to a tree near Moriarty's house.

The "Little Ellen Gold Mines" are now extremely rich, but all their wealth is not half so precious to Philip as is the love of his wife.

Enfield Joiner.

The Romance of an Eccentric Will.

A Lover by Legacy.

As the train steamed out of King's Cross Station, Philip Carew glanced over the miscellaneous assortment of literature which he had purchased at the bookstall. Taking up "Bradshaw," he found, by studying a complicated array of figures, that the three o'clock train from London to Linthorpe took a dreary five hours over the journey, reckoning the time spent in changing, first at Peterborough, then at Boston, and again at an out-of-the-world junction he had never before heard of. Having ascertained this, he threw himself back in his corner seat, crossed his legs, and tried to interest himself in a popular magazine.

But this was impossible. He was in no mood to follow the adventures of people who had never had any real existence. Besides, their experience seemed quite commonplace beside his own.

He threw the magazine aside, leant his head against the cushion, and began to reflect on the situation with half-closed eyes. Until the eccentric will of his uncle Christopher had fallen like a bomb at his feet, his life had been quiet and uneventful, and he had known the solid happiness of the artist whose work is rapidly increasing in public favour. But now!

Had his uncle's legacy of £1,000 a year not been qualified by so preposterous a condition, he would have considered himself one of fortune's special favourites, for the regular receipt of so large an income would remove all necessity for turning out "pot-boilers." But unfortunately the money could only be his on condition that he married. That was not such a very trying ordeal after all, ordinary folk might say, but ordinary folk did not understand such matters. He had always held firm to the doctrine that men with artistic careers before them should never marry. Being already wedded to Art, they could not well do so without being guilty of a subtle kind of bigamy!

Still, it would not have been quite so bad if his uncle had left him a little choice in the matter, and allowed him to make his own selection from the ranks of marriageable maidenhood. But Mr. Christopher Carew had decided otherwise, and had actually named the lady whom Philip must marry before he could enter upon the enjoyment of that tempting legacy.

"Madge Waring, of Linthorpe, Lincolnshire."

As there were no other occupants in the compartment, he repeated the name aloud several times, and then fell to wondering what kind of girl this Madge Waring was. The will simply mentioned her name, studiously ignoring all essential particulars. His imagination, therefore, had the widest possible play. She might be anything in age from fifteen to fifty. In looks, she might be dowdy and plain or surpassingly beautiful. Either way it could not matter much, for he had fully made up his mind at the start to wash his hands of the whole mad business.

After pondering over the matter for a whole week, he had suddenly made up his mind to run down to Linthorpe, seek out the relatives of Miss Madge Waring, and apprise them, in as delicate a way as possible, that he was not at all disposed to accept a wife on his uncle's tantalising terms. If he found them cultured people, he would soften his refusal of the lady by informing them of his vow to remain always an artistic celibate. Then he would return to London and to his work, and forget that there was such a person in existence as Madge Waring.

At Peterborough he changed into a slow train. As it did not start immediately, he occupied himself with studying the country folk standing on the platform. It was a relief for him to listen to their talk after sitting for two hours in a lonely carriage, with no company but his own conflicting thoughts. He was inwardly hoping some of the rustics would enter his compartment, when, just as the train was about to move, a young lady, who had bid a hurried good-bye to two children on the platform, entered the compartment, and, quite out of breath, sat down in the further corner.

When the train had started, Philip Carew again tried to read, and again failed. But this time his thoughts were diverted from the printed page, not by shadowy visions of an imaginary bride, but by a more tangible specimen of womanhood—the young lady in the corner.

She had a magazine, too, and was reading with evident interest. Ah, it was easy enough, Carew reflected, to be composed when you hadn't to solve an intricate problem set you by an eccentric relative. This girl was to be envied, for she at least was at liberty to marry or not, and whom she pleased.

He continued gazing at her over the covers of his magazine. She was pretty beyond question, and it was that type of beauty which pleased him best; the beauty which is quite compatible with the existence of brains. A well-shaped brow shaded a fine pair of light brown eyes, thoughtful and expressive. Her mouth was mobile and sensitive, the curve at the corner of the lips showing that she had the faculty of humorous appreciation. No doubt she would see the humour of his own predicament if she only knew it. He himself had dim glimpses of the fun of the thing occasionally; but the full enjoyment of the joke was only possible to outsiders.

As he peered over the edge of his magazine, he was conscious of a fine colour effect. The slanting rays of the setting sun were transfiguring the girl's light auburn hair. He watched the effect with all the artist's delight.

Presently the train pulled up with an unpleasant jerk, which threw them both forward, and caused the girl to drop her magazine. Carew politely recovered it for her, and received as his reward a pleasant smile. He had been longing to break the silence, and here was the opportunity.

"This will be Boston, I believe?" he said.

"Yes," she replied, without any constraint, "you can see the famous church tower quite plainly from this window."

He crossed the carriage. "Ah, yes," he said. "I seem to recognise it in a vague sort of way. Yet I can have seen it only in a picture, for I have never been in this part of the country before."

"No?" she said, "you will find it interesting, I think."

"You know it well?" he inquired.

"It is my home," she informed him.

"Boston?" he asked.

"No—Linthorpe, away there by the sea. I am going there now."

"By Jove!" Carew exclaimed, "so am I! How strange, and yet how pleasant to find I shall have company."

The girl smiled. "These slow journeys are a trifle wearisome," she said, "And I'm afraid you won't find Linthorpe looking at its best just now. The season doesn't commence for quite a month yet."

Carew's brow clouded. "I'm not going there for pleasure," he observed lugubriously. "Quite otherwise."

They continued chatting on a variety of matters, and in the course of conversation, he ascertained that she was a governess living with a family a little way out of Linthorpe. She showed great interest when he spoke of his own profession, and she made one or two sound observations on art which quite astonished him.

Her manner was so frank and agreeable that he found no difficulty in talking quite unconstrainedly. In fact, he felt so much at his ease, and her tastes were so congenial with his own, that it almost seemed at times he was chatting to an old friend.

A smart gig was awaiting her at Linthorpe Station.

"Good-bye," he said. "I am awfully glad to have met you, and, although it is a bold wish coming from a mere stranger, I hope we may meet again."

"I am afraid not," she returned. "The chances are against it, for you have told me your stay in Linthorpe will be brief, and as for myself, I seldom travel. But you will be taking back some studies, I suppose?"

"Yes, in all probability. It depends on my mood. I may go off with my sketch-book to-morrow instead of attending to the business I have in hand. By the way"—he found the temptation quite irresistible—"do you know a family here of the name of Waring?"

She was stepping into the gig as he asked the question. When she looked at him, he saw in the growing twilight that her face was flushed, no doubt through the exertion of climbing to her seat.

"Waring?" She paused, and looked at him strangely. "Oh, yes. They live in the Boston Road, which is quite near here."

"Oh, thanks," he replied. "You have saved me the trouble of looking at the directory," he added, as the gig drove off.

* * * * * *

The next morning was glorious, even for early May, and Carew, after breakfasting at his hotel, did not feel in the least disposed to call on the Warings. The glimpse which he caught of the sea at the end of the street acted upon him like magic. He quickened his pace and walked towards the shore. That unpleasant business could wait.

From the artistic standpoint, his visit to Linthorpe was well-timed. There was no holiday crowd to distract his thoughts or disturb his reveries. Only a few stragglers were to be seen on the front, while away to the north, where the irregular line of the sand-hills faded into the horizon, there was perfect solitude to be had.

He walked briskly along the firm sands, and was soon comfortably seated on a sunny bank overgrown with long grasses and sea-thron, plying his pencil with enthusiasm. He began to feel that, in spite of that mad business of his uncle's, his sojourn at Linthorpe would not be wasted.

Why, it was an ideal place for the artist! On one hand, the sea with its ever-changing colours; on the other, the strangest landscape he had ever beheld—a grassy plain, flat as the palm of the hand, dotted here and there with long-armed windmills and the grey towers of village churches. He busied himself for hours, and only ceased sketching when his book was full. Then he remembered his lunch—and that Waring affair. Would he see this illusive Madge? he wondered. Would she burst upon his ravished eyes, a creature of peerless charm and grace? He must not think of such things. Such thoughts were treason to his imperious mistress, Art! He began, half-mechanically, to outline a girl's face on the cover of his sketch-book. When he had finished, he held it from him, and stared at it intently. Strange! It was wonderfully like the face of the girl in the train.

He closed the book hastily, for he heard the sound of approaching footsteps. Looking up, he saw the figure of a girl walking over the sand-hills. As she came nearer he stared at her in bewilderment, half doubting his senses. The newcomer was his travelling companion of the day before!

She was attired charmingly in a dress of creamy whiteness. From under the neatest of sailor hats a few curls had broken loose from their companions, and were blowing in the breeze.

She coloured slightly as she recognised Carew, but spoke with her usual frankness.

"So you could not resist this beautiful shore?" she said quickly. "I hope it has given you inspiration? It sadly wants an artist to 'discover' it. A poet"—she drew from her pocket a dainty edition of Tennyson—"has shown the way."

"Ah, yes, I remember," he said. "Locksley Hall is not far away, I believe?"

"Oh, no, quite near!" was her response. "I know it well, as I know most of the Tennyson country. Whenever my charges are away, and I am free to wander here by the sea, I am constantly trying to identify the local colour in the poems."

He noticed that her eyes were on his sketch-book.

"Perhaps you would like to see these rough pencillings of mine?" he said. "They are frightfully crude, and your interest in the scenes is my only excuse for showing them."

She glanced over the sketches with evident interest, and her praise of some of them was manifestly sincere. When she came to the end she paused, and then he remembered the girl's face on the cover.

Apparently she recognised it, for when she returned the book her cheeks had heightened in colour. She hastened to change the subject.

"You have seen your friends, I suppose?" she asked.

"The Warings? No!" he answered. "By-the-bye, I think you said last night that you know them?"

"I know Mrs. Waring very well and—her daughter. She is a widow."

"Who—the daughter?"

"Oh, no; how stupid of me! The mother, of course."

"I shall be seeing them to-night."

Here the sand-hills ended abruptly, and he could not further pursue the matter, for their ways lay in different directions.

As he watched her disappearing he was surprised at the strange sense of exhilaration which he felt. He put it down to the effect of the sea air. Of course it could not be that he was becoming captive to a pair of light-brown eyes! His vow of single service to Art precluded the bare possibility of such a thing. Still, he could not help reflecting that if the girl had only been Madge Waring, he might not have regarded his uncle's caprice as quite so unreasonable!

* * * * *

When he did call at the Warings that evening, the young

lady who answered the door informed him that Mrs. Waring was out, but would be back shortly. Would he leave his card or step in and wait?

He fumbled in his pocket, only to discover that he had left his card-case behind him.

"My name is Carew," he said. "Philip Carew."

"Ah, yes," the girl replied. "You have an appointment with mamma, I believe—on a matter of business!"

He stared at her like a man in a dream. So this was Miss Waring! And she coolly referred to that dread compact as "a matter of business." She showed no agitation at the sight of him. The display of coolness under the circumstances was quite exasperating.

She showed him into the drawing-room with fine indifference, and as she was lighting the gas he had an opportunity of observing her. Certainly she was not a bad-looking girl, nor ill-proportioned either. But how did she compare with the fairy of the sand-hills? The sooner he got this wretched business off his mind the better.

Before he had any chance of sounding the conversational depths of this girl, whose fortunes were so closely bound up with his own, Mrs. Waring returned, and her daughter left them alone.

Mrs. Waring had evidently been prepossessing in her youth; even now a sad, refined beauty lingered about the lines of her face. Her kindly reception of Carew encouraged him to speak without restraint.

"You will admit, madam," he began, "that the position in which I am placed is, to say the least of it, somewhat curious. I awake one morning to find that an uncle, whom I scarcely knew, has left me the sum of £1,000 annually on condition that I marry a lady, whom I had not only never seen, but never even heard of. I am wholly in the dark as to the motive underlying this curious caprice."

"It was a strange whim, I admit," Mrs. Waring replied; "but your uncle was a strange man."

"You knew him then?"

"We were great friends when we were young—very great friends." A slight flush crept into the pallor of her cheeks. "But we parted and did not see each other for years. Latterly, however, Mr. Carew would often visit us here—the Linthorpe air suited him—and he took a great fancy to Madge."

That was all very well, Philip thought to himself, but uncles' fancies were not necessarily transmissible to their nephews.

"Did my uncle ever mention my name?" he asked. "I only saw him twice in my life; once, some ten years ago, when he wished me to take a position in his ironworks; and the second time about a year ago, when he visited my studio and gave me to understand that the profession of painting was only suited to the wastrels of life, and was, moreover, a short cut to perdition!"

"Those were not your uncle's real opinions," Mrs. Waring said, with some spirit. "In his heart, he had a great regard for you, and a high opinion of your talents. But he thought, for some reason or other, that you would be better off and altogether safer if you married and settled down. He had a brother once, I have heard, also an artist, whose career seemed to provide him with a warning example."

That must have been his improvident uncle Hugh, Philip reflected, from whom he was supposed to have inherited his own talent.

"There were other reasons besides—sentimental reasons if you like—which made your uncle desirous of having this match between a member of his family and a member of mine."

Again that becoming blush overspread her pale features. So all men had their romance, Philip thought—even his hard-headed uncle Christopher. Mrs. Waring waited for him to speak, but, for the life of him, he did not know how to begin. He was on very delicate ground.

"But what are your daughter's views?" he blurted out, in a voice that stumbled over the words. "Judging from appearances——"

"But you have not seen her."

"Why, she opened the door!"

Mrs. Waring smiled. "Ah, I see the mistake. That was my daughter Alice. Madge does not live at home. She is a governess at ——"

"A governess!" he exclaimed; "why, that must be——"

He paused, and Mrs. Waring looked at him astonishment.

"Do you mean, Mr. Carew, that you have met Madge?"

"For the life of me, I can't tell you, madam!"

Before Mrs. Waring had time to digest this unintelligible reply, a knock was heard at the door.

"That is Madge's knock, I am certain," said the old lady, and before she had finished speaking, Philip Carew had risen from his chair and rushed into the hall.

There stood Madge Waring, his fairy of the sand-hills, his travelling companion of the night before! She did not seem at all perturbed at the sight of him. Coolness ran in that family, he reflected.

"Yes, Mrs. Waring," he said, as he re-entered the drawing-room, "I have met your daughter before, but without knowing who she was. In that respect, I should imagine that she had the advantage of me."

"It was quite of your own doing, Mr. Carew," Madge replied. "You see artists don't come every day to Linthorpe; especially," she added slily, "artists who have business with a family of the name of Waring!"

"You might at least have disclosed your identity," he said, with mock resentment.

"How could I"—she paused and blushed—"under the circumstances?"

When they were alone he said to her:

"I don't know how you regard this strange business. For my part, I will be perfectly frank. I had fully intended to tell Miss Madge Waring of my uncle's will, whenever I might meet her, that my heart was not mine to give."

Her coolness had now quite disappeared. "Mr. Carew," she said, in an agitated voice, "do not labour under any misapprehension. I, too, had quite made up my mind to——"

"Pray allow me to finish," Philip interrupted. "I repeat I had intended to tell this lady my heart was not mine to give. That was the sober truth. The fact is, I half lost it in the train last night, and the loss was completed"—he imprisoned with his own, the hand which, in her excitement, she had placed upon his arm—"when I met the sweetest girl in the world on Linthorpe sand-hills this afternoon!"

Fred J. Cox.

All the Difference.

"Why, Clara, you look radiant! What has happened?" "I've just received an invitation to a wedding." "Well, there's nothing particular in that to go into raptures over." "Yes, but it happens to be my own."

Part Confidence.

Old Friend: "You should always take your wife into your confidence. Women appreciate that sort of thing." De Broker: "Oh, I do that; that is, in part." Old Friend: "You tell her of your gains and losses, I presume?" De Broker: "Um—I always tell her of my losses."

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THE BRAINS OF THE FORCE.

A Series of Detective Mysteries by R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," "The Golden Dwarf," &c., &c.

THE AFFAIR ON THE PRINCE'S YACHT.

CHAPTER I.

"You May Have Seen My Husband."

"THE conveyance in which I came, sir, awaits us at the door, and I beg that you will accompany me with as little delay as possible. The affair is urgent."

Lucius Shand—the person to whom these somewhat haughty sentences were addressed—fingered deliberately his full, clean-shaven chin, and took a cool survey of the speaker. He was slightly-built and elegantly attired, and his dark, stiffly-waxed moustaches and close-cropped hair, no less than his marked accent, betrayed the foreigner. His pronunciation had enabled the quick ear of the divisional surgeon to identify him as an Italian.

"A moment," said Lucius Shand, thoughtfully, "I am not fond of unknown destinations and unspecified errands. Where do you wish to escort me, and for what purpose?"

The Italian glanced impatiently at the door of the surgeon's private room; he had but just entered the apartment, and was plainly anxious to leave it.

"I have told you," he replied, "that your professional services are needed immediately, and at no great distance from here. So long as your fee—which shall be anything you care to ask—is duly paid, why should you concern yourself further in the matter. However, I will answer your two inquiries, since you attach importance to them. I desire you to go with me at once on board the *Saturnia*, Prince Peschari's steam-yacht, which lies off the nearest of the riverside landings—there—there has been an—an accident."

"An accident of what nature?" demanded Lucius Shand, "that I must learn if I am to come prepared for dealing with it promptly."

"H'm!" responded the Italian, reflectively, "let us say that you may anticipate being confronted with an unquestionably severe type of chest wound."

The divisional surgeon raised his bushy brows as he turned from his visitor to gather some medical requisites into a hand-bag. This done, he picked up his hat, but paused with it halfway to his head.

"Why have you sought my aid?" he queried, "there are other and more prominent practitioners in the district."

The Italian shrugged his shoulders. "How should I know them?" was his response, "I am not familiar with this vile port of yours. I consulted a policeman, he mentioned your name, called me a cab, and here I am."

Lucius Shand seized his bag with an air of decision and opened the door by which he stood. "Very well," he said, "I am at your service."

He exchanged a few words with his assistant at the dispensing-counter outside, and looked at his watch. It was barely four o'clock, but the summer afternoon was lowering and overcast, as if by an impending storm. The surgeon's young colleague had had to set going a couple of gas-jets, by which to pursue his compounding of pills and draughts.

When Lucius Shand and the Italian strode forth into the street a few heavy drops of rain were splashing the pavement; they ceased almost immediately, the storm seemed in no hurry to break. As the two drove off in the visitor's hansom, a flash or two of lightning flared across the brooding sky, succeeded by the muffled reports of distant thunder.

Between the time that the surgeon and his guide mounted into their cab and its arrival at the jetty for which it was bound, the latter only spoke to offer Lucius Shand a cigarette. The surgeon declined it with a brief, abstracted acknowledgment. The Italian selected one of the dainty trifles, put a match to it, and puffed silently.

At the jetty a smart gig was rocking on the swells that rolled in among the wooden piles of the massive landing. Her crew were trimly clad in blue serge, and there was a suggestion of wealth and good taste about the elegant little craft. His guide motioned Lucius Shand, courteously enough, to step into her. The surgeon did so, the Italian imitated him, the gig was cast off, her prow swung clear of the jetty, and the oarsmen began to sweep her, with strong strokes, athwart the dingy mercantile river, under the sombre, storm-laden heavens.

Ahead of her, in the middle of the stream, was moored a handsome modern steam-yacht, with a slender black and gold hull, black funnels, and raking, square-rigged masts. She was flying the Italian flag. The gig made swiftly for her accommodation ladder, and Lucius Shand and his escort soon found themselves ascending it to the level of the principal deck.

The divisional surgeon studied the yacht critically as he passed up her side, crossed her snowy planking, and descended a spacious companion-way into a tiny but luxurious apartment, evidently intended to serve as an ante-chamber. Here Lucius Shand's guide recovered the use of his tongue.

"If you will excuse me for a short while," he remarked, "I will ascertain if your patient is ready to—to receive you."

Lucius Shand assented, and the other disappeared through a neighbouring exit, which he carefully closed, and, the surgeon fancied, locked behind him. The act excited Lucius Shand's curiosity, already sufficiently whetted; he chose a seat adjacent to the door in question and leant towards the upright crack between it and the posts of its frame. Nevertheless, in spite of his strained attention, he could hear for some time only the murmur of subdued voices. Suddenly a peculiar sound, not unlike a continuous, sustained hissing, penetrated to the surgeon. It was combined with another, such as might have been produced by the frequent movement of solidly-planted human feet.

Lucius Shand started, and then drew out a large knife and opened a substantial "picker," which formed part of it. Holding the knife as a carpenter holds a gimlet, he thrust the "picker," with a rotating motion, through the panelled partition of the cabin and put his eye to the resulting aperture.

His guess had been correct—the hissing sound was indeed the noise made by the long and supple blades of fencing foils as they slipped over each other, from point to hilt, in incessant feint and parry. Nor were these the harmless "buttoned" variety, common to the gymnasium, but the deadly, bodkin-ended species employed to-day only by Continental duellists.

"The dickens!" muttered Lucius Shand, "I was prepared to discover that there had been a duel, not that there was one in progress. What the deuce ought I to do? Mind my own

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business, I imagine—I'm not supposed to be able to see through an oaken partition and I can scarcely confess to my ingenious expedient of boring a hole."

He was studying the combatants as he murmured doubtfully to himself. The room beyond was a sort of smoking-saloon, illuminated by electric pendants, and having a parquetry flooring. On this, the duellists, relieved of their coats, vests, and collars, faced one another.

For a better purchase upon the smooth parquetry, they had discarded their shoes and fought in their stockinged feet, though the firmness that it was necessary to lend to each new position adopted by the combatants, caused the tell-tale sound which, mingled with the hissing of the foils, had reached the surgeon's ear.

The duellists were obviously well-matched. They were a tall, powerful, man with an aquiline nose and grizzled moustaches, and a slight, agile fencer with a sensitive pale face, contrasting oddly with his opponent's set, cold smile. The seconds and several additional onlookers stood just clear of the contest, silent, eager, absorbed in the struggle.

The fighting was being forced by the taller of the swordsmen, his antagonist seemed to be content with defending himself. Yet, as Lucius Shand watched, the former, lunging at his opponent, received the point of the latter's weapon in the flesh of his upper right arm. The seconds sprang in and the duel was interrupted.

"Now for my share of the business!" said the surgeon, putting his ear instead of his eye to the opening he had contrived. To his surprise there fell on it again the sound of the foils. He looked hastily, to perceive that the taller of the duellists, a handkerchief tied tightly about his right arm, was fencing with his left. The smile had not deserted his lips, and Lucius Shand noticed that his play was no less rapid and skilful than before. But the younger of the combatants was seriously inconvenienced by the change in his rival's sword-arm, and he gave ground reluctantly, inch by inch.

The surgeon was lost in the excitement of the moment when a footstep on the companion-way, which led down to the apartment where he was, caused him unwillingly to abandon his peep-hole, and fling himself into a seat. A woman was descending the stair which sloped from the deck above. She was a pronounced brunette, slender, graceful, olive-skinned, with delicate Italian features and a proud, girlish face. Observing Lucius Shand she bowed, the surgeon returned the bow.

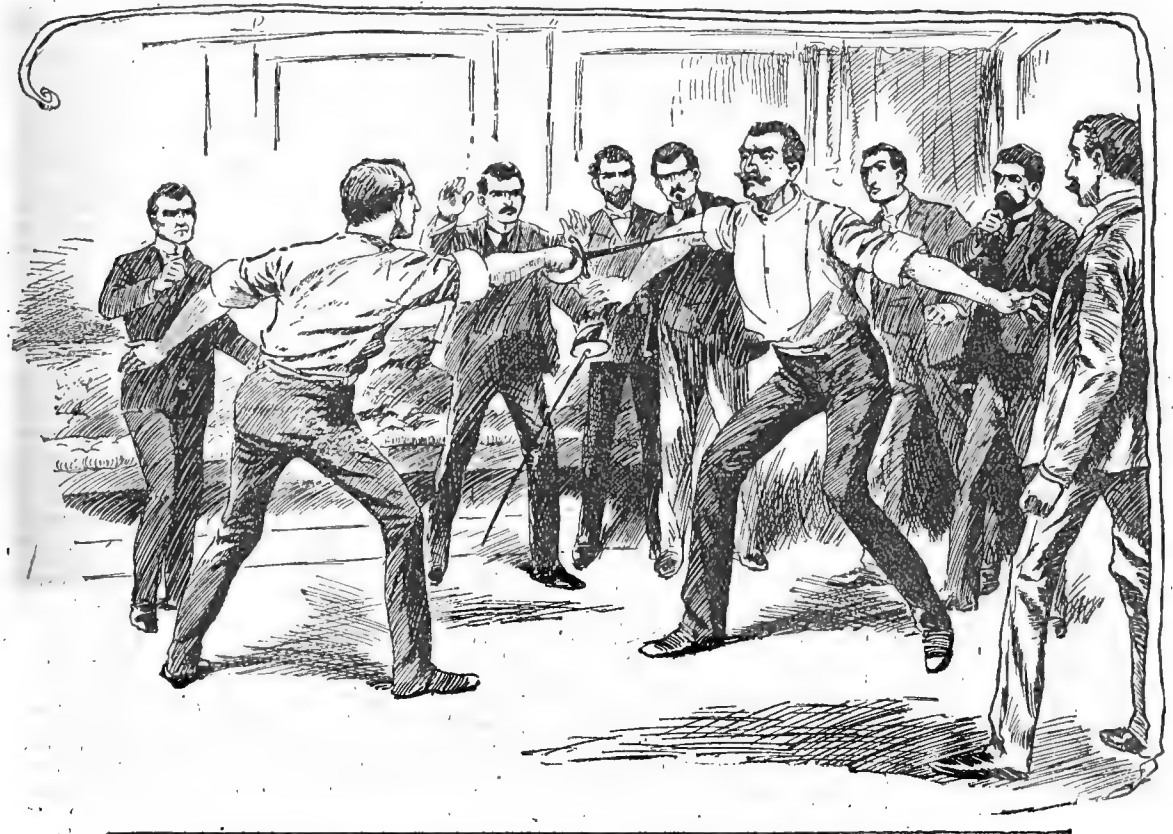
"I beg your pardon," she said, "I did not know there was anyone here. But perhaps you may have seen my husband, that is, Mr. Secco. Are you staying on board? I am sorry not to be acquainted with all my father's guests, but I can tell you are English. Is there a large party?—My husband and I are only passing visitors, we live in this part of the country."

"And I also," answered Lucius Shand, "but I am not even a chance visitor; I was waiting to—to see Prince Peschari, I believe, with reference to a—a professional matter."

"Ah," was the friendly reply, "then it is my husband who is keeping you—and me also. I have actually had to come in search of him. He is with my father—the Prince, that is."

She stopped and put her hand to her bosom; the sibilant murmur of the foils had arrested her attention.

"What is that?" she whispered, alarmed, "listen!—it is



The former, lunging at his opponent, received the point of the latter's weapon in the flesh of his upper right arm.

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in there, the ring of swords." And she would have darted to the door, but Lucius Shand interposed pityingly.

"Some of the Prince's guests practising," he said, with ready self-possession. The girl's colour returned and she forced a laugh.

"Of course—of course!" she stammered, "how foolish of me! But my husband was wounded once in a duel with swords, and the sound of fencing always makes me feel faint. I——"

A dull thud broke into the sentence—the noise of a heavy fall. A deep groan followed it. An agonised scream burst from the girl's throat and she leapt towards the inner exit from the ante-chamber. Ere she reached it, it swung wide, and the youthful Italian who had summoned Lucius Shand to the yacht appeared on the threshold.

"Doctor," he said drily, "your patient is ready for you." He stopped and recoiled, noticing the other occupant of the small room. "Donna Margherite!" he faltered, but the girl had sprung past him and thrown herself upon the body of the defeated duellist. He was the shorter and slighter of the two combatants, and he lay motionless upon the parquetry floor of the saloon.

"Carlo! Carlo!" she moaned, "speak to me, speak to me—tell me that you are not dead!" There was no response, and the duellist's wife rose on her knees, staring about her. "Who—who has done this?" she said hoarsely, in a low, strange voice.

A tall figure with a grey moustache stalked to her side, still carrying in a lean left hand, a supple foil.

"I," it answered coolly, "your father, Margherite, has avenged himself."

A terrible cry pierced the air; the girl reeled and dropped to the floor—she had swooned, almost instantaneously. Lucius Shand was bending over her husband.

CHAPTER II.

"Obey Me Implicitly."

"A LITTLE more brandy, Carter—easy, easy, he only needs the merest fillip! That's enough."

The divisional surgeon motioned away the glass that his assistant had been holding to the lips of the wounded duellist. Their patient lay in an arm-chair in Lucius Shand's private room, and the surgeon was overhauling the bandages that he had placed, some half-hour earlier, on the former's chest.

"Is he seriously hurt, sir?" asked the wondering assistant, setting down the glass.

"Fourth rib on the right side laid bare over half its anterior pectoral surface," replied Lucius Shand, "he went off with the pain—he's all nerves and not particularly robust. He recovered consciousness in the cab, but fainted again after a question or two. S—sh, he's coming round."

Their patient had indeed sighed, he stirred, and, with a suppressed groan, sat up, gazing about him. His glance fixed on the divisional surgeon.

"Doctor," he said vaguely, "have I been dreaming, or did you tell me that my wife had been left on board the yacht?"

"That is so," answered Lucius Shand, "I was informed that she was to be sent on shore as soon as she was fit. Your escapade has a little upset her—she—she got wind of it."

The other rose resolutely to his feet. "I'm all right now doctor," he intimated, "you said my wound wasn't dangerous—if I remember our conversation in the cab."

"With care," objected the surgeon, "*and* quiet. I confess, however, Mr.—Mr. Secco, that I took the liberty of warning your friend, or rather father-in-law, that you could not live more than a few hours; he imagines you run through the right lung and the liver."

"Why did you do that?" demanded the Italian, abruptly. Lucius Shand frowned.

"I hate duelling," he said, "and but that professional confidence prevents my acting as an ordinary citizen, I should communicate with the police. Though I suppose, being Italian and having fought under the Italian flag, you could only be prosecuted with the Government's consent. But I hate murder even more than duelling, and Prince Peschari's left-handed play was nothing less than murder."

"You saw the fight?" gasped the other, "I did not know you were present."

"My view," admitted the surgeon, "was obtained through a fortunate aperture. But that is not the question—the point is, what do you wish me to do? I agreed to bring you off to my surgery, with the assistance of some discreet servants from the yacht, and to communicate with your friends, whose addresses I was given. Not that I should have mixed myself up with the affair at all, had I not known that you would recover, and—well, had I not suspected a romance behind everything, and been sorry for your wife."

"My wife!" repeated the Italian, "so she is aware that I am wounded—she believes, no doubt, fatally. Good Heavens, what agony she must be suffering—what agony she will suffer!"

"You should have thought of that before you consented to engage in such an idiotic thing as a duel," said Lucius Shand. His patient turned on him indignantly.

"Do you imagine I would willingly take part in an encounter with my wife's father?" he cried. "No, I was compelled to fight by the threats and cowardly insults of Prince Peschari and his friends. It was for that purpose I and my wife had been decoyed on board the yacht, it was with that object the *Saturnia* called here. Your presence was simply to lend an air of correctness to the affair—the Prince knew that he could wound me beyond the power of medical skill to heal (he is one of the best swordsmen in Italy) and so he would have done, had not his foil swerved on a rib instead of piercing my chest."

The Italian drew a painful breath. "Not that I am a poor swordsman," he added; "only a year or two ago, for Margherite's sake, I fought with Count Pelligri, the young fellow who came for you, and, though I was slightly wounded in the struggle, I disabled him for three months."

He made an impatient gesture. "My wife!" he exclaimed, "it is her we must think of, she is in the Prince's power, the power of an autocratic Italian father, and on a swift steam-yacht. They will immure her in some lonely castle, they will tell her I am dead, they will believe it themselves." He sat down despairingly and hid his face.

Lucius Shand looked significantly at his assistant, and the latter withdrew. The surgeon laid a gentle hand on the Italian's shoulder.

"Mr. Secco," he said, "you can trust me safely. Something of this I suspected, but you and your life had to be my first care. I saw that you had stood merely on the defensive, and that enlisted my sympathy, no less than your wife's grief. Tell me, are you residents in Great Britain, or only visitors?" His patient glanced up hopefully.

"Residents," said the Italian, "but, alas! not naturalised. I am Carlo Secco, the eldest son of a well-known Neapolitan merchant. A year ago I eloped with Prince Peschari's only daughter, and married her in England. He is a haughty Italian noble and vowed vengeance. Tempted by a proffered reconciliation, Margherite and I visited the *Saturnia*. The rest you know or can guess. By now the yacht will be on her way down the river."

Lucius Shand pondered the situation. "You've got yourself

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Carlo Secco leapt in and clasped his wife in his arms.

into a corner, Mr. Secco. Out of England your marriage is not valid, and by the Italian law, your wife, while unmarried, has little freedom from paternal control."

"I know, I know," groaned Carlo Secco, "all is lost." The surgeon's response was to seize his patient's wrist and feel his pulse. This done, he thrust a thermometer under the Italian's tongue and took his temperature.

"You're a fairly healthy subject, Mr. Secco," he said, "but for your nerves; and you are not, so far, much the worse for your wound, now the shock has passed off. If you'll keep cool, *very* cool, we'll have a shot at getting your wife back. You will obey me implicitly?"

"I am your slave from this moment," promised Carlo Secco, eagerly. Lucius Shand buttoned his patient's coat and handed him his hat.

"Come," he said. They went out into the street together, Mr. Carter watching them amazedly, and got into a convenient hansom. The surgeon gave an address and the vehicle went off in the same direction as that which bore Lucius Shand, three-quarters of an hour before, to the river-side. The storm which had been impending all the afternoon had broken and a steady downpour, the sequel to a tropical deluge, descended upon the town.

Near the line of the docks the surgeon alighted, helped his patient out, paid the fare, and led him towards a small floating stage, whereon was a white wooden block of buildings, with a curious tower. From the top of this fluttered a long pennant and on the wall of the ground-floor a lettered board intimated that they had arrived at a depôt of His Majesty's Customs. Moored to the front of the stage was a rough yet powerful launch, whose fine hull and large engines showed her to be a veritable greyhound.

Lucius Shand escorted the Italian into a waiting-room, and himself scaled a narrow flight of stairs. When he returned, there were with him several shrewd, stalwart men in a naval looking uniform. These last crossed the waiting-room to a cupboard, and began to equip themselves with water-proofs and sou'-westers, for the rain still pattered loudly on the windows and leaden roof of the place. The divisional surgeon stepped to the side of Carlo Secco.

"The *Saturnia* went down the river twenty minutes ago," he murmured. "I have given a bogus piece of information that her steward has a large quantity of valuable wines concealed aboard, and that he has been smuggling them ashore at various places. The chief officer is a friend of mine, and he knows it is only a blind, but they must have some excuse for pursuing her. So say nothing to anyone, and I'll pass you on the launch as an inquisitive acquaintance."

The Italian wrung the fingers of Lucius Shand. The surgeon released them smilingly, and went to borrow a set of oil-skins for himself and his patient. Then, effectually disguised in huge coats and waterproof caps, they hurried out

on to the stage, and joined the Customs' officials in their launch.

The little vessel backed away from her berth, put on all steam, and darted down the dingy stream in the drenching rain. The Customs' officers balanced themselves on her cramped deck, clinging to whatever might serve to steady them. For a quarter of an hour she drove onward in the wind and the wet. Lucius Shand was talking gravely with the chief inspector. Suddenly a long green and white cutter impelled by eight oars, shot across their course.

"By Jupiter!" said the divisional surgeon to his friend in command, "the police boat. Let us hail them and tell them to follow us. They would be useful if we encountered any—ahem!—resistance."

"Very well," was the cheerful rejoinder; "in for a penny, in for a pound." The speaker made a motion to the engineer, a blast shrieked from the launch's steam-pipe, and she drew over to the cutter. A few words passed between the sergeant-in-charge and the chief of the Customs' officials, the police boat was brought round, and proceeded at a slower speed.

Ten minutes later the launch was overtaking the Italian yacht, which, with a sail or two close-hauled, was making all speed towards the mouth of the river.

The Customs' boat whistled to her to stop, and displayed clearly her official flag. For a while the yacht held on her way, but more prudent counsels prevailed; she stopped her engines and came up into the wind. The Customs' officials boarded her, and climbed to her dripping deck. The tall man, who had played so deadly a part in the duel witnessed by Lucius Shand, approached them.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion," he said haughtily; "do you know that I am Prince Peschari, and that this is my private yacht?"

The chief inspector composed his features into a look of official severity, and glanced at the surgeon. Lucius Shand had buried himself in his oilskins and sou'-wester. So had Carlo Secco, prompted by a covert hint from his companion.

"We are sorry to detain your Excellency," replied the inspector, gravely; "but we have information that your steward has a quantity of valuable wines concealed aboard, and that he has been landing them surreptitiously at various British ports in the course of your tour. I'm afraid we shall have to search the vessel."

The Prince stamped irritably on the deck. "As you will," he said. "It is an absurd allegation; my steward is an old and trusted servant, and I do not credit your story in the least. But, however, you may satisfy yourselves."

Solemnly the Customs officers addressed themselves to their search. Lucius Shand and the Italian (who by now had realised the effectiveness of the surgeon's ruse) keeping at the elbow of the chief. Thorough as was the investigation, they found no sign of that which they were most anxious to unearth, the Prince Peschari's daughter. At length they paused before a small locked door forming the extremity of a corridor.

"That is a lady's cabin," explained their guide, a superior servant; "doubtless she has locked it herself from within."

"Quite so," retorted Lucius Shand; "but His Britannic Majesty's Customs must do its duty. Madam," he added, raising his voice, "we are loth to disturb you, but a party of British Customs' officers desire to search your cabin."

A cry of joy was the response, and the latch rattled vainly. "You are English!" exclaimed a musical voice, broken by the sound of a sob. "Oh, please, please, force the door open. I did not lock it. I want to get out."

Carlo Secco sprang at the panels with desperate energy. "Margherite!" he called, "Margherite! It is I, Carlo, your husband; you are saved, you are saved."

The surgeon drew back gently his impulsive client, got out his knife, put its most powerful blade into the crack of the door, and forced it over. The door swung ajar, Carlo Secco leapt in and clasped his wife in his arms, just as the Prince came frowningly into the corridor, accompanied by a group of his friends. The alarmed servant had hastened to summon him. Lucius Shand glanced from the porthole—the police boat was hooking on to the yacht's side.

"Explain this outrage!" he said coldly. The surgeon threw wide his oilskin coat, doffed his sou'-wester, and pointed smilingly to the interior of the cabin. The Prince recognised his resuscitated son-in-law, and a curse broke from his lips as he strode towards him. Lucius Shand barred his entrance.

"You are out-played, Prince Peschari," he announced; "already a boatful of police is boarding your yacht. You do not threaten us with violence, I suppose. Stand back, sir, and permit this lady to regain the protection of the British flag, from which you have so unscrupulously torn her. Look!"

The Prince followed the direction of the surgeon's forefinger through the open porthole. It indicated the file of sturdy river police that were mounting the *Saturnia's* accommodation ladder. A terrible oath was the only answer, and then, with a sign to his compatriots, he stepped sullenly from the corridor. Before long the Italian and his wife were speeding up the river on the Customs' launch, while the yacht, cheated of her prize, pursued her course down it.

"All's well that ends well," said Lucius Shand to them; "but I wouldn't make this little incident public property. At least, not until my friend of the Customs here has retired on his pension—it might get him into trouble. We've all been bluffing shockingly, and doing things the law would by no means back us up in."

"And you," answered the pretty Italian girl; "will you also be in danger of trouble for having been so kind to us."

The surgeon looked thoughtfully at the golden evening that was closing in upon the river after the day of storm.

"Faith," he rejoined, "I don't know and I don't care. What Irishman worthy of the name wouldn't chance his luck for a lady's sake. But see, the sun is shining on us royally; let us all take it for a good omen."

AN EXPLANATION. . . . .

Last week I promised my readers that in the next number of *Short Stories* I would commence the publication of a series of true stories, written by a young girl of good birth, who for some years was lady's companion to a well-known Society lady. During the whole of the time that she acted in this capacity, Cynthia (the lady's companion) was absolutely ignorant of the true character of the woman she served, and not until just before leaving her service did she suspect her of the series of crimes of which she was guilty. Being thrown on her own resources, Cynthia has been forced to make money by writing, with the result that these remarkable articles came into my hands.

And now I have to apologise to readers for an unforeseen delay. After the articles had been accepted and put into type, I received a letter from the authoress, inclosing a newspaper cutting dealing with the arrest of a Society woman for alleged embezzlement, and pointing out to me that the woman in custody was her late employer.

I have taken counsel's opinion, and I am told that I must postpone publication of the articles until the case has been through the courts, and the woman either acquitted or condemned. As the case comes on about the end of May, I hope that the first article will appear in *Short Stories* for June 14th. I am sure, however, that my readers will feel greater interest than ever in the true stories, when they do appear. THE EDITOR.

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THE PROPOSAL.

Bed and floor were littered with satin shoes, silk petticoats, bright sashes, gloves, opera cloaks, and all that went to produce the untidyness of Ilma's bedroom before a dance. She was just twenty—the eldest of three sisters.

Agatha, the youngest, was balanced on the end of the bed in great spirits, offering advice in a high-pitched tone.

Terese, the middle one, was sewing a button on to a tan glove.

"I wish I were out," said Agatha; "I do adore dancing."

"Oh, time enough. Wait until you know a little more geography and history," said Terese.

"I'm sure, I don't feel a bit inclined to go," Ilma began, with a sigh. "I don't see much pleasure in meeting new people, and talking for only ten minutes with each. I wish it were the fashion to divide one's programmes into three sections, and give six dances each to three men."

"You would have nothing to talk to them about all that time," said Terese.

"It is the other way about," answered Ilma. "I've too much to say, or they have not enough. Men at dances sit back and expect you to do all the talking, and think it is they who are amusing you, whilst you make yourself hot and hoarse with descriptions of plays and books, tell all your private opinions and family affairs without meaning to, and you are left with a horrid, empty, pumped-out sensation, so that you hope you will never meet them again. I wonder if all girls feel the agony of pauses and silence as much as I do? I can't resist filling them up, and then say things that I am sorry for, and end by knowing nothing—absolutely nothing—about my partner. Not that I want to; but he knows all about me."

"First you grumble at the dances being too short, and then you say that you disgrace yourself by talking so much. Why talk at all?" suggested Terese.

"Because I know it would kill me not to; but whether my partners are nice or dull to-night I am not going to talk. I shall try to be another type of girl. I want something new—a proposal. Wouldn't that be exciting?"

The sisters stared with interested surprise.

"I think a proposal, if you were laughing at the man, would be most unwholesome and uncomfortable," said Terese.

"It would be heavenly," exclaimed Agatha.

"I think I'll try to-night. I believe I've stopped seven men from proposing by putting them off because I did not love them. I never have loved any of them—at least, I don't think I have—Arthur was the nearest approach—so I showed it, and they did not propose. But I shall pretend, and look as though I meant a lot. I want a real proposal. Others have had several at my age."

"Will you let him kiss you?" inquired Agatha, with wide open eyes.

"N-n-o, I won't let him do that—unless I mean to marry him; but I will allow him to propose."

"You would have to dance with him all the evening before he could reach such fever heat as that."

"I'm sure I could make someone do it in four dances!" answered Ilma.

"Only four!" gasped Agatha.

"Four ought to be ample, I consider."

"Supposing he does propose, will you refuse him at once?" asked Agatha.

"No. I shall tell him I will write next day, when I have thought the matter over."

Ilma found herself at the dance by a quarter to ten, having promised to wake up her sisters and relate particulars on her return. It was not very long before she discerned a handsome partner, with whom she had established a friendly footing at two previous balls. She must catch his eye and bow, instead of waiting, as was her habit, until she should be discovered, or her programme would be overrun with indifferent creatures. He was at her side in an instant.

"This is a pleasure," he said; "I hope I am not too late?"

"I have five and six."

"May I say both?"

"Oh, both?" she answered innocently. "Well, yes, of course!"

"Might I have another?"

"Do you mean a third?" showing him her programme.

"Yes, if you please. I see you are not engaged for No. 10, may I have that?"

"Ten or twelve—which?" and she looked sweetly at him.

"Or twelve?" he echoed. "But how can I choose? It is too difficult. Let me say both again."

She blushed. She saw that he really wanted them, and she agreed.

"Thank you," he said pleasantly; "I will look for you here."

The rest of her card filled up very soon, but no one else was given more than two.

She could see that he liked her. This was a good begnning. Then the meanness of it all made her despise herself and she thought of withdrawing. He was not a man who trifles with girls; but he showed a light-hearted gallantry towards women, and there was an honest high-mindedness about him that put to shame her petty plans.

But, then, it was only a joke, and the girls at home would be scornful and disappointed if she returned with no result for her enterprise. So the thirst for a real proposal took possession of her, and she made a final resolution to see the thing through.

She managed very well during numbers five and six, and decided to sit out numbers ten and twelve.

It was with dread that she met him when number ten arrived.

"Which chair will you take?" he asked when they had found a retired nook.

"I like the one with cushions best," she replied.

He seated himself beside her. She said nothing. He was to amuse her, so with a soft self-surrender, she left the conversation to him.

"What do you think of the band to-night?" he said, by way of a beginning.

"I don't know," she answered, gazing apathetically before her with dreamy blue eyes.

Other subjects were broached with as negative results.

He was perplexed. What had come over the girl? He knew she could not be in earnest, and yet she was stolid and unbending. Perhaps she did not consider him worth talking to. Anyway, he could look at her, for no one could be uninteresting with such a charming face.

He turned to obtain a view of the girl before him. Her hair, from which there peeped two pink rosebuds, shone golden-brown, and little stray curls fell over her forehead and round her ears in a soft, indefinite halo. There was a gentle, thoughtful expression in her face, of which he only gained a side view, for her head was bent, and her eyes were fixed on her fan. The long lashes curled upwards, and high colour burnt in her cheek. He noticed the dainty black satin dress—the spray of pink roses over her shoulder, and the rose sash round her waist. He could not help comparing all this with the whiteness of her neck and arms, and the graceful line of her skirt. She was wholly unaffected now—and he realised that she was beautiful.

"Have you any idea what dance is on?" she asked.

"Number twelve has just commenced," he replied, as he re-pocketed his programme.

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"I must go back to the dancing-room at once," she said, rising. "I am engaged for number twelve."

"Yes, to me!" he returned; "shall we dance it?"

She looked at her card. "Oh, dear! See what I have done."

He drew her by the arm gently down into her chair beside him.

"Never mind," he said; "you've only cut number eleven. It is too late to go back now. He will be with his next partner; and this is my dance, you know."

"I must explain and tell him I forgot. He will think I did it on purpose; and I would not for anything. Oh, I am very sorry!"

"It is my fault," he confessed. "I will tell him so. I lost count."

"No; I will explain myself. He will not be offended. He knows me well—is one of my best partners. He will forgive me."

"Who wouldn't? I wish I had such a chance."

"Do you?" she answered, with a pretence at getting up. "Shall I hide through number twelve, so that you may forgive me afterwards?" Her eyes twinkled.

He laughed. "No! Stay where you are—I see I am the lucky one, after all."

She leant back on the cushions. A pause ensued. There was only half a dance left!

Evidently this thought occurred to him too. "Are all your dances engaged right up to end—up to eighteen?"

"I am afraid so," she answered. "I must go soon."

Their eyes met for an instant. He leant over the arm of her chair, and played with her sash.

"You were so strange at the beginning of the evening," he faltered. "I couldn't make you out—thought I must have made a fool of myself or something the last time we met. Did I?"

"Why, no!" she answered.

"That's right," he went on. Then his manner changed. "Do you know," he said in an earnest way, as though making a confession, "I tried to please you—to make you like me that night, and I believed, by your manner a little time back, that I had failed altogether."

Her conscience smote her. "Ah! no. You were like the clever woman," answered she, in the hopes of self-excuse, "for your good points lay beneath the light exterior."

"Did they? I mean did you really think so?" His eyes shone.

"I hoped so," she corrected.

"Did you? I am glad you hoped so—Miss—Miss—may I know your Christian name?"

"Ilma," she answered.

"Ilma!" he echoed, and then half to himself, "Ilma! It is the only name that could have been yours. It is a lovely name—so soft. So sweet to say. Ilma!"

A smile flickered round her lips. For the moment he was unconscious of her presence. He seemed to be raptly watching her in his mind in association with the name.

"Ilma!" he said suddenly, so that her heart jumped.

That began it all—a rush of words—his prospects; he was the eldest son—heir to an estate—his wonderful admiration for her. "I have only met you three times, but I have known you always. Last month, when I met you first, I knew I had known you always. I must speak at once while I am with you. To-morrow I go into the country for months, perhaps, and this is our last dance——"

"For to-night," she interrupted.

"I mean our last to-night," he agreed. "I—well—plainly, I love you, Ilma—have loved you always"—he twisted her sash end up into a little tight ball. "I am afraid I have no chance—I know it—but will you just love me—a little, even if you won't marry me."

He held her hand and pressed it as he spoke.

"Say yes—say you will," he whispered.

It had come; her brain whirled, and words failed her. She was living through his anxiety and her own remorse—her pulses raced each other.

"Don't don't!" she begged brokenly. "I wish—I wish you hadn't."

It was true. She was miserably sorry. His love now lying at her feet, seemed some sacred treasure, wonderful and shining, which she dared not touch even to restore it into his own keeping.

"Why do you wish that?" he asked softly. "You have promised someone else. Tell me, or have I no right to ask?"

"You have only met me three times," she suggested tremulously; "you cannot know me enough."

"Once settled it," he replied; "I vowed when I had known you an hour to propose at my first opportunity, if you did not appear to hate me."

She felt sick and cold.

"Say something."

She heard his voice vaguely as though very distant and far away.

"I think I am a little faint." She raised her hand to her forehead. It was cold and damp.

He drew her arm through his own in a masterful way. "Are you sure you can walk?" he inquired.

"Oh, quite," she replied—adding, "With your help."

He smiled gratefully, and they made their way to the ball-room.

She soon found her chaperon, who met her with an airy, "You are looking pale, dear. Make it good-night. You will be better tucked up in bed than dancing if you feel tired. Thank you, Mr. Monteith, if you will put her into her carriage—so good of you. Ah, Sir George, you here? I'm looking younger than ever? Nonsense. But you always say the right thing, don't you now; so generous. We like—ah yes, we like it. Each hoping that the compliment may be true."

She hurried away.

Ilma went for her wraps and they met in the hall. Roger put the cloak over her shoulders, opened the brougham door and wrapped the rug round her knees. Then, with one foot on the step, he took her hand and began pulling off her glove.

"I go away to-morrow, or rather to-day, at one o'clock," he said, practically. "Here is my address for the next three days. Perhaps you could send me a line if it is one way—or if not, I will know what you mean, of course. This is my ring. I am going to put it on your finger to remind you of—of to-night. You don't mind? It is a little large for you, isn't it?"

He raised her hand to his lips.

"Good-night," he said. And as he looked up her eyes were full of tears. "Ilma, my darling girl."

"Good-night," as steadily as she could. She turned her head away and began absently to read the address he had given her.

He shut the door and was left with uncovered head in the moonlight, gazing after the brougham as it rolled out of sight.

* * * * * *

She let herself in with a latchkey. The house was still as death—save for the clock, which ticked so loudly that she feared it must wake everyone. There was a light in the hall, which she switched off, and proceeded to feel her way silently upstairs. In order not to be heard, she took off her shoes and stole upwards with calculated movement

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She reached the first landing in safety, but alas! Terese's boots had been put outside, and sure enough, Ilma tripped over them.

"Is that you?" called a drowsy voice. "Early, aren't you? Enjoy yourself?"

"Yes, very much. Don't bother to wake up."

"Did you put the light out downstairs?"

"Yes, dear; good-night!"

"Night," drowsed Terese; "shut the door after you."

She was obviously too sleepy to question or even remember the evening's escapade. So far so good.

Ilma continued the perilous ascent, but when she neared Agatha's room there came the excited cry:

"Ilma, I'm awake—come in and tell me about it."

"It's too late. Wait till to-morrow."

She looked in through the half-open door and saw Agatha sitting up in bed—the light full on—with pink cheeks, wide, dancing eyes and curl rags tied in little, tight nobs standing wildly out all round her head.

"No, I can't. Don't make me, I've waited ever since you went. Besides, it's to-morrow now. Did he? Oh, tell me?"

"Who—what?"

"Did he propose in the romantic, proper way?"

Ilma writhed. "Yes, he did; now go to sleep!"

"What fun! Don't go; tell me what he said. Did you do it in four dances?"

"Well, in four dances and a half."

"You clever girl. Without kissing him too, or did you kiss him?"

"No, I did not, of course," Ilma answered.

"And we will write and refuse him? What is his name? Do you think it will break his heart?"

"I don't know how he will take it. His name is Roger Monteith. Now that is all. I am tired, Agatha, I must go now."

"You are slow, I thought you would be so thrilling," moaned the enthusiast. "Roger Monteith—it has a nice, romantic sound. But I suppose I must wait. You don't know, I might be dead when I wake up, or anything, by the morning." She curled herself down among the bedclothes.

"Yes, that's right," said Ilma. "It's so late, you know."

The lively head popped out again. "Well, I'm glad you made him propose—very glad. I bet Terese a box of chocolates that you would. She will be wild."

"Go to sleep, child; though you look as if nothing on earth would make you. Out with the light. Good-night. Shall I shut the door?"

"No," cried Agatha, with nervous warmth; "no, leave it open. You know I can't bear it shut."

Turning into her own room, Ilma swung the programme over the looking glass, and undressed as quickly as possible. With a tired sigh she sank into her soft, warm bed, but her mind was at work, and her heart so troubled that sleep did not come for quite an hour.

It was late in the afternoon. Rays of the setting sun streamed through the window. Terese was shopping, Agatha not yet back from school. Ilma, silent and alone, was seated at the writing-table in the library, gazing at the envelope newly addressed, in her own firm hand-writing—with the end of a pen between her little white teeth.

"If that is posted to-night he will receive it to-morrow morning," she thought.

All day she had been pre-occupied; shutting herself up in remote rooms, composing and tearing up half-finished notes. Agatha had gone off at nine o'clock, so the conversation of the early morning had not yet been renewed, much to Ilma's relief. Just now she was feeling rather shy and happy—perhaps a little important, too, having answered all on her own responsibility. She wondered how she would find sufficient courage to tell the family, and what they would say—if they would pass it off with a laugh, or her father tease her for letting the poor fellow into it. Or perhaps they would be pleased.

How different all looked now. His love and sincerity were so obvious. Her little beginnings had, after all, not brought the end about—they more likely had hindered it; he himself, had said as much—for he had loved her in an hour, whilst she—well, she kissed his seal ring now on her finger and blushed to herself.

She took up her letter and eyed it with keen interest. In the middle of it her glance fell on the blotting-pad, over which she realised she had been experimentally scribbling "Ilma," "Roger," "Mrs. Ilma," "Mr. and Mrs. Monteith," close together, and with guilty haste she tore it off and burnt it.

Just then the maid entered and laid an evening paper on the table.

"I feel inclined for something sensational or sentimental!" thought Ilma. She unfolded it and ran her eyes down from one heading to another.

"Whilst cycling on the Grosvenor Road shortly after noon to-day, Mr. Roger Monteith lost control of his bicycle descending a hill, and was thrown off with great violence. When picked up he was found to have sustained concussion of the brain and other injuries. He was removed to the local hospital, where he has since died."

She read without flinching to the end—when the paper fell from her hand, which had become too cold and lifeless to hold it. There could be no question as to its truth—the whole statement was plain to a ghastly degree.

There came a patter of feet and an approaching rustle of skirts. The library door was flung open, and Agatha burst in, fresh, fair, and fifteen.

"At last I have found you!" she cried, as she dashed her hat and books into an arm chair. "I have been thinking of it all school time, and lost ten marks for inattention. I can tell you ever so many ways now of saying 'no' to Roger Monteith. Oh you mean wretch!" She had caught sight of the envelope. "You've gone and refused him without our help, and you promised, too!"

The sun glared on to the envelope, and fell over Agatha's glittering hair.

Ilma, like one frozen, rose, and with a cold hand lifted the dead answer from the table and dropped it into the fire.

"There is no need to send it now," she said.

In a moment Agatha's eyes and voice were full of trouble and anxiety. She looked at her sister anxiously.

"What's the matter? There is something the matter. I can see it."

The flames caught the letter, and it blazed up. In the strong light the young girl noticed, with strange misgivings, her blanched set countenance.

"Oh what is it? Are you very ill?"

Ilma shook her head.

She knelt by Ilma's chair, and took both her hands.

"A man's ring!" she breathed, with bewilderment.

Ilma started, and the ice was broken. With a stifled cry she threw her arms round her sister's neck, and hid her tears in the soft curls.

"Help me! Tell me what to do!" she sobbed, in tragic grief. "Oh, Agatha, Agatha, he can never know, for I can never send him my answer now."

A. B. O.

LOOK OUT FOR THE HONEYSUCKLE AND THE BEE ON NEXT WEEK'S COVER.

Two Points of View.

"BUT, my dear, you are so pretty that I really cannot see how your beauty needs any addition in the shape of such expensive finery as you wish," said Mr. Wickwire. "Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Wickwire. "If I were as pretty as you pretend I am, I would not have to argue so to get a new dress."

Another Matter.

"WIFE," said a man, looking for his razor-case, "I have places where I keep my things, and you ought to know it." "Yes," she said, "I ought to know where you keep your late hours."

Easily Managed.

MRS. BILLUS: "John, the doctor says I need a change of climate." Mr. Billus (absorbed in his paper): "That's all right, Maria. The weather forecast says it's going to be twenty degrees colder to-morrow."

Nice for the Major.

THE MAJOR (rocking Nelly on his knee, for Aunt Mary's sake): "I suppose this is what you like, Nelly?" Nelly: "Yes, it's very nice; but I rode on a real donkey yesterday—I mean with four legs, you know."

Still Hope.

"AND who would have thought that I should ever be the mother of a poet?" exclaimed Mrs. Plainfield proudly. "Oh, well, I wouldn't worry about that!" replied her neighbour, misunderstanding. "He'll have better sense when he's older."

Altered His Mind.

HE: "My dear, I believe I shall sell a piece off our frontage." She: "Why, Charlie? You said when you bought the place you would never sell an inch of that lovely lawn, even if we were starving." He: "My love, at that time I had never had any experience in running a lawn mower."

How He Won.

"I HOPE you will excuse my delay, Mr. Jones," she said sweetly; "but I must confess I ran up to my room to look into the mirror a moment before seeing you." "You are quite excusable, Miss Fair. A lady with a face so attractive, may well be excused for wanting to look at it occasionally." Miss Fair is never out to Mr. Jones when he calls.

What He Needed.

"WHY don't you call me a donkey, and have done with it? You've hinted at it long enough," he snarled out. "It wouldn't be quite true," she replied. "I suppose not. I suppose I haven't ears enough for that animal," he retorted sarcastically. "Oh, yes, you have," she returned sweetly. "You don't need any more ears." "What do I need then?" "More legs and a better voice."

To Help Her Memory.

"I SHALL be away a whole year, so I must give you a keepsake, my pet," he said, drawing a rather insignificant ring off his little finger. "It's not much, Charlie, is it?" she remarked. "No, darling. But it isn't the intrinsic value of the thing that——" "Of course not, dearest," she hurriedly interposed. "But, my own, if you could manage to give me a diamond ring I should be so glad. You see, dear, if I had a diamond ring I should always be looking at it, and that would make me think of you; and I do so want to think of you when you're away."

The Suitor Retired.

ELDERLY MAIDEN (out rowing with a possible suitor and her little sister, who is frightened by the waves): "Theodora, if you are so nervous now, what will you be at my age?" Little Sister (meekly): "Thirty-seven, I suppose."

Knew What He Wanted.

TRAMP: "It is needless to ask you the question, madam. You know what I want." Lady: "Yes, I know what you want badly, but I've only one bar of soap in the house, and the servant is using it. Come again some other time."

Very Important.

LAURA: "Auntie, should I be justified in writing to a young man who had never written to me?" Auntie: "Only on very important business, my dear." Laura: "Well, this is important business. I want to marry him."

Appropriate.

"WOULDN'T you like some mottoes for your house, mum? It's very cheering to a husband to see a nice motto on the wall when he comes home." Mrs. Browne: "You might sell me one if you've got one that says, 'Better late than never.'"

Overheard at Margate.

EXCITED LADY (on the beach): "Why isn't something done for that ship in distress, sir?" Coastguard: "We have sent the crew a line to come ashore, mum." "Good gracious! Were they waiting for a formal invitation?"

Suburban Troubles.

"WHAT'S the trouble between you and Widgely? You were friends while you lived in town?" "Yes, but you see we bought adjoining properties in the suburbs." "What of that?" "Why, he's cracked on poultry, and I'm growing a garden."

Taking Care of it.

SMALL BOY: "Papa, will you lend me your knife?" Papa: "Lend you my knife? It isn't a week since I bought you a new one. What have you done with it? Lost it?" "Oh, no, I've got it yet." "Then why don't you use it?" "You said I must take care of it, and I want to take up some tacks."

Why He Liked School.

VISITOR: "Do you like going to school, my little dear?" Little Fauntleroy: "Yes, indeed." "You love your school, don't you, my pet? And you love your teacher, too, don't you?" "Oh, yes; I wouldn't want any other teacher." "Of course not." "No, indeed. She's awful near-sighted."

Had Seen Too Much.

MISTRESS (to butler): "Well, John, I hear you have come into quite a little legacy. I suppose you will be thinking of getting a wife now?" John: "Lor' bless you, mum, not if I knows it. I've seen too much of married life, begging your pardin', mum."

Business.

MARY: "George, I have heard you spoken of frequently as a successful business man." George: "I am that. Why?" Mary: "Well, considering the fact that you have been visiting me for three years, I think you should maintain your reputation and talk business." He maintained his reputation.

Sorry She Spoke.

HUSBAND (kindly): "My dear, you have nothing decent to wear, have you?" Wife (with alacrity): "No, indeed, I haven't; not a thing. I'd be ashamed to be seen anywhere. My very newest party dress has been worn three times already." Husband: "Yes; that's just what I told Blifkins when he offered me two tickets for the opera to-night. I knew if I took them they'd only be wasted. So I just took one. Well, I must hurry."

Google

Beware the Landlord.

"Isn't there such a crime as conduct calculated to provoke a breach of the peace?" asked a nervous-looking man of a magistrate yesterday morning.

"Of course there is," responded the magistrate.

"Then give me a warrant for my landlord," demanded the nervous man.

"What has he done?" asked the magistrate, eyeing the suitor suspiciously.

"He comes to my house when I've got company, and says he wants the four months' rent I owe him, and sits out on the front steps and howls for his money. If I kick the spine out of him I'd be arrested, wouldn't I?"

"Yes, you would. Why don't you pay him?"

"That isn't the question. He comes to my house at four o'clock in the morning and yells through the key-hole, and then he goes up through the vacant house next door and gets on my roof and shouts down the chimney. He says he will have that money. If I blow him up with gunpowder, it would go hard with me, wouldn't it?"

"Certainly. Can't you come to some understanding with him?"

"It seems not. Has he right to climb over my paling and have fits in my back yard just because I owe him a little money?"

"Does he do that?"

"Of course he does; and when we haul him into the house, he yells murder and draws a crowd. Have I got the right to maul the life out of him with a club for that?"

"I think not," responded the magistrate. "Why don't you move?"

"That's got nothing to do with it. I want to know if he is entitled to slip up on the ice and fall through my basement window, and do two pounds' worth of damage to the glass. Couldn't I knock the stuffing out of him for such an action as that?"

"Certainly not."

"But when he lays down on the pavement and howls that his mother is dead and he can't bury her because I won't pay what I owe him; do you mean to say I haven't got any remedy?"

"I don't know of any. I think you'd better pay him his rent."

"But isn't it conduct calculated to provoke a breach of the peace when he comes round with a quart of laudanum and a pistol and threatens to take 'em both on the premises if I don't pay up? Isn't it a crime when he hangs himself to a tree in front of my house with a paper pinned on him that I drove him to suicide? Won't the law touch him for coming to my door at daylight as drunk as a lord and claiming he's me?"

"I don't think you can do anything but pay him or move. The man has a right to his money, and if you won't pay, well, you must take the consequences."

"That's all I want to know," replied the nervous man, appearing relieved. "I'm the landlord, and my tenant says he'll have me arrested for doing these things. Now he'll have to pay up or I'll fall off the top of the house and have an inquest in his parlour. A man can't live four months in my house for nothing without going to some trouble." And the nervous man pranced off glowing all over with grim determination.

[John Smythe.

Domestic Reciprocity.

"Dear, please tell me how to spell costume. I'm writing to mother about my lovely new gown." "Well, are you ready?" "Yes." "C-o-s-t, cost." "Yes." "T-o to." "Well?" "M-e, me, sixty-five shillings as yet unpaid." "You're a wretch."

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A PIECE OF WEDDING CAKE.

The Old, Old Story Told in a New Way.

Jack Kempster sat on an overturned barrel. He was diving down into a box before him and taking out slowly, one by one, the different articles that had been sent him.

Each present was neatly packed, and many had names attached.

"Such a collection of things," murmured Jack, as he deposited them all in a heap, with a view of going over them again.

It was a warm, pleasant day. Christmas always had been associated in Jack's mind with snow and cold, but here it was balmy as summer.

"West Africa is all very well," Jack had said that morning to one of his friends, who also had enlisted as a private, "but give me snow, and ice, and freezing generally that we have at home. It seems as if that were a part of Christmas."

In truth, Jack felt rather homesick, and he thought gladly of the time when he could turn his back on all this and go back to his work again in the office.

This was at 9 a.m. Before 10 each man in the regiment had his Christmas box and had gone off by himself quietly to investigate the contents.

Jack slowly went over the packages. There was a dainty handkerchief with his initial embroidered in the corner.

"Not much use out here," thought Jack ruefully. There was a lot of tobacco from a young man friend at home, a number of books, a few photographs, and, tucked in one corner, was a tiny package marked "For the owner of the box.'"

Jack took the latter up and eyed it curiously. He felt sure he had never seen the writing before. It was pretty and delicate. A woman's, evidently. It made Jack feel eager to see the contents, and he hastily tore off the wrapping paper.

Inside was a tiny box covered with white silk wrought in rosebuds, and round it, written upon a dainty sheet of paper, was a letter.

Jack Kempster read the letter with evident amusement. Then he opened the little box.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated as he did so. "That girl is clever. She did send some after all."

Ten minutes later he was with his friend, Tom Carpenter.

"Tom," he cried, as he flourished his letter in the air, "have you a letter like this?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'like this,'" averred Tom, who was in a more sedate frame of mind, "but I've got a piece of wedding cake from some girl at home and a letter."

"So have I," cried Jack, "and here is my letter. Did you have one like it? Just listen and see."

With these words he began to read excitedly:

"'I know we have been forbidden to put any eatables in the Christmas boxes sent out to the boys in the regiments, but I am determined to smuggle my package in. I have taken six pieces of wedding cake and put in six different boxes. These boxes will be covered with a piece of the dress I wore at the last wedding where I was bridesmaid. I have been bridesmaid at six weddings. They all say I make such a nice one, but no one seems to think I want a wedding of my own. Perhaps one of you six young men will hunt me up after you get home, but at any rate put the cake under your pillow and dream of—The Maiden All Forlorn.'"

"Doesn't that beat everything?" cried enthusiastic Jack, when he had finished. "And we haven't an idea who did it. I am going to save my box, for it matches her dress, and if I hunt the world over I'll find that girl."

"Humph," ejaculated Tom. "She can stay 'the maiden all forlorn' for all I care. A girl must be pretty hard up to do this, even if she is in demand as a bridesmaid."

But Jack noticed that the little box was carefully put away in Tom's knapsack, and that crumbs of wedding cake decorated his friend's cot the next morning.

* * * * * *

It was evening at a South of England summer resort. The verandahs were full of guests, and men in flannels and maidens in airy costumes were walking to and fro on the broad walk that led to the ball-room. The regiments were home from West Africa. The summer hotels were crowded, and conversation did not lag for want of a topic.

Jack, Tom, and several of their chums had come down together for a short holiday.

From Mrs. Van Tweezer's cottage close by, the sound of music floated upon the air. Inside there were a few guests assembled to listen to the singer of the evening, a young girl who had studied extensively in the Continental centres.

"We will bored to death, there is no doubt," Jack Kempster remarked as he struggled into his dress suit and reflected that it was over a year since he had worn the habiliments of civilisation.

Later he stood in Mrs. Van Tweezer's reception-room. By his side was Tom Carpenter, somewhat lame yet from the ugly wound he had received at the front, but still genial and pleasant.

"Do you know the name of the singer?" Jack queried, as he ran his eye over the room. He received no answer, for at that moment Tom, who was beside him, gave a violent start.

"I think," said Tom, "my leg is so bad, I will go over and sit in the back of the room. You do as you please, Jack." And before Jack Kempster knew it, his friend was gone.

Then there was a little bustle and a hush. A young woman stood up in front and prepared to sing.

What she sang Jack never knew. He saw a vision of brown hair, with eyes that matched; a small, delicate, oval face, and—ye gods! could it be true? This girl had on a dress made of the very silk that decorated the box wherein his bit of wedding cake was sent.

Jack felt sure of this. He surreptitiously put his hand into his pocket and pulled out the cover of the box. Ever since Christmas he had carried it with him, and now he was to meet her at last.

The young man quivered with excitement. As soon as the applause subsided Mrs. Van Tweezer found Mr. Kempster before her.

"Such a delightful evening," he murmured. Then, as if conventionalities were over: "May I ask for an introduction to the singer? She has a sympathetic voice."

"I am glad you like it," replied Mrs. Van Tweezer patronisingly. "Best of all, she is a charming young girl. I should be pleased to present you to Miss Templeton, but I saw her just this moment pass through the door with Mr. Thomas Carpenter."

Jack said nothing, but he reflected that for once Tom had the better of him, and that when the wedding cake came it was Tom who had said: "A girl must be pretty hard up to do this."

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Out on the verandah Miss Templeton sat in a deck chair with her hands clasped before her. By her side, perched on the railing and opening and shutting her fan as he spoke, Tom Carpenter was holding forth on the subject of the campaign.

"And to think we should meet here," murmured Miss Templeton softly.

As she said this Tom looked at her dress.

"Do you know," he said at length, "a curious thing happened? We boys had each of us a Christmas box from home. It was awfully jolly and nice, and we were delighted with the contents and the thought that there were people at home who really cared for us. Well, six of us fellows received each a tiny box filled with wedding cake, and there was a letter with it."

Tom paused purposely. The girl at his side sat motionless.

"Do you want to know what was in the letter?" he asked at last.

"Yes," she said quietly, her brown eyes fixed apparently on the Japanese lanterns that swayed to and fro in the breeze.

Tom went on: "It was from a girl, and she said she was tired of being a bridesmaid, and——"

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Templeton, rising suddenly. "I really must go into the house. It is my time to sing again."

"Not until you have heard me, Elizabeth," and the name came naturally to Tom's lips. "Confess that you wrote it. Did you think one of them would fall into my hands?"

Elizabeth attempted to flee, but Tom detained her.

"I know your writing. Have I not treasured up enough to know it in Africa? I am a lame soldier, just returned from war. I haven't much to live on, but I love you, Elizabeth, and have for years. Will you let me tell you so now?"

As he said this Tom took Elizabeth's hands in his and looked gravely into her face.

"Come," he said, opening his arms. "Confess you sent the letter."

"Oh, Tom," she cried, as she hid her blushing face on his shoulder. "I—I was so miserable. There you had gone off without saying a word and—and when I heard you were wounded I—I thought I would die. I—I didn't dare send one letter and cake just to you alone, so I sent six pieces and knew that you would get one."

"Elizabeth, you're a trump," said Tom softly, as he stroked her head. "I always thought so, and now I know it, and I am the happiest man in all the world."

* * * * *

The next morning Jack Kempster said nothing as he listened to the confidences of his friend, Tom Carpenter.

"Why don't you ask who the lady is?" asked Tom, in a tone of disappointment. "When a man is going to marry, his friends usually are interested enough to ask the girl's name."

"Because I know already," was the laconic reply of Kempster, as he walked over to the grate.

There was a fire in it to take off the chill in the room, but Jack shivered a little as he threw in the lid of a box covered with white silk wrought in rosebuds.

J. L. C.

Present, Past, and Future.

THREE girls were exchanging confidences and telling each other what sort of men they liked best. First Girl: "I like a man with a past. A man with a past is always interesting." Second Girl: "That's true; but I don't think he's nearly so interesting as the man with a future." Third Girl: "The man who interests me, is the man with a present."

What They Couldn't Do.

MISS ELDER: "Well, I maintain that women can do anything men can." Mr. Gazzum: "Oh, no. The auctioneer's business is one women cannot go into." "Nonsense! She'd make every bit as good an auctioneer as a man." "Just imagine an unmarried woman getting up before a crowd and exclaiming, 'Now gentlemen, all I want is an offer!'"

Living on a Shilling a Week.

Now and again we hear of people existing for longer or shorter periods on minute quantities of food. A case which occurred recently in Lancashire is worthy of attention. Miss Bertha Mosedale, of Georgina Street, Bury, remembers a time when for six long weeks she did not eat a shilling's worth of food a week. Bile Beans for Biliousness have now so toned up her whole system that this sad state of affairs is merely a recollection. To a *Bury Boro' Advertiser* reporter she said: "For a long time I suffered from weakness, and I was fagged with the least effort. Do what I would I could not rid myself of a done-up, worked-out sensation. I had no desire for food, no energy for anything, no ambition, and little hope of a cure. Eventually I had to leave my work and take to my bed. For six weeks I remained there, and during the whole of that time I don't think I ate a shilling's worth of food in a week. Bile Beans for Biliousness were recommended to me, and by giving them a fair trial I soon reaped a marvellous amount of good. They have now cured me entirely, and I have resumed my work. I feel better in all ways than I ever remember to have done in my life before." Debility and anæmia were solely responsible for Miss Mosedale's condition. For these ailments, for indigestion, sleeplessness, "that done-up feeling," loss of appetite, nervousness, headache, constipation, piles, dizziness, loss of ambition, pains in the chest and back, all female ailments, skin eruptions, pimples, and all blood impurities, Bile Beans for Biliousness are an unfailing cure. Obtainable from all chemists, or from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 London Wall, E.C., upon receipt of price, one and three-half-pence or two and nine.

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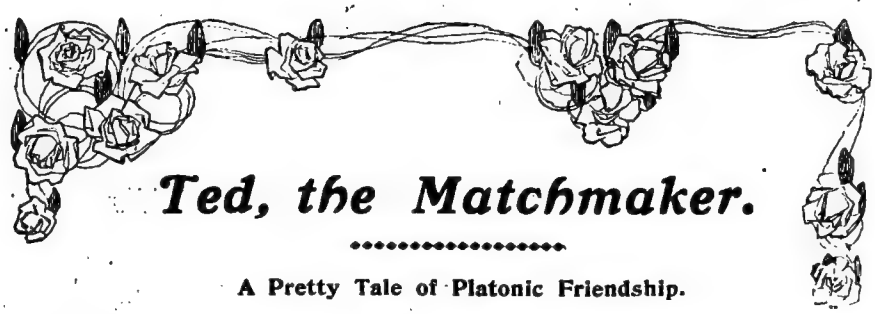

Ted, the Matchmaker.

A Pretty Tale of Platonic Friendship.

For more than seven years now John Whewell had, every evening on the stroke of eight, passed, in his usual whirlwind fashion, up the main stairway of Riverside Mansions, Chelsea.

The regularity of John's evening visits to Mr. St. John's flat had made them to be eagerly looked for by Audrey, Mr. St. John's only child.

Papa St. John was a widower, and it must be confessed a not very agreeable old gentleman. The prevailing idea with him was that the largest moiety of his income should of right be spent upon himself. This being so, poor Audrey had a somewhat hard time of it; the house-money being doled out to her in such meagre and inadequate sums that she was often hard put to it to square the domestic circle.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Audrey had come to regard John Whewell's nightly visit as being paid, in the main, to herself, and to cherish thoughts not perhaps quite warranted by the actual facts of the case.

Sometimes she would say to herself that she was too old to marry. "Why, I saw another half-a-dozen silver hairs this morning. And yet thirty-five isn't really old. Besides, John is forty, and—well, it's disgraceful for me to be thinking such things! But then, papa would be so much better alone! and I? Audrey St. John, I'm ashamed of you!"

Not that there was anything really to be ashamed of, for it was only to her own heart that she whispered the hope that, some day, John Whewell would ask her to be his wife.

But John, as yet, had never spoken. Truth to say, he had never actually said anything that could reasonably be construed into other than mere courtesy and friendly good-nature.

On the occasions of John Whewell's visits he usually remained an hour; smoked a pipe with papa St. John, chatted with Audrey; always leaving the latter happier than he found her.

But on this particular evening the head of the house was out—a club dinner, or something of that sort—and Audrey, lonely, disappointed, and full of depressive imaginings, felt more than ever the need of John's cheery presence.

Then the shadows deepened—it was midsummer—and the silence became painful, almost beyond bearing.

She could not ask even her old schoolmate and present close friend, Kitty Prendergast, for reasons; for very shame she could not put on her hat to go and do it.

"People's tongues wag quite fast enough," she said to herself.

No doubt she exaggerated both the circumstance and her own fears, but how she longed to know the "why" and the "wherefore." And this, not of curiosity merely, for she had sense enough to be aware that the knowledge might really prove the deathblow to her heart's desire.

By a strange chance the very one who could let daylight into the mystery, looked in about nine o'clock.

"What, Audrey! no lights! Why, what's the matter with you? Where's Mr. St. John? And—and—— Oh, no—of course not—he *couldn't* be here!"

Audrey said nothing except that she was pleased to see her friend.

"Audrey," went on Kitty Prendergast, the veriest rattle-trap, and yet of all women the biggest hearted, "I do declare you just look ghastly!" switching on the electric light over the mantelpiece as she spoke. "What is it all about?"

"Oh, nothing, Kitty! nothing! There is nothing whatever the matter with me. I am having a quiet think, that's all."

"Nonsense, my dear!" returned her friend meaningly. "I know better! Shall I tell you something — something that you would give your ears to hear?"

"I don't know that there is anything I want to hear—particularly," said Audrey.

"No? Well, my dear, that might do for some people, but it will not do for me! You are a mendacious little hypocrite, Audrey St. John! Don't want to hear, indeed! What is it, do you suppose now, that has kept a certain gentleman of our acquaintance from being seen at Riverside Mansions this evening, eh?"

"Kitty! What *do* you mean? Gentleman, indeed! It may be all very clever—as a joke—but I fail to see the point of it; perhaps because it is such a poor one!"

"Well! of all the—! What would you say now, if I told you that John Whewell's young brother, Ted, is back unexpectedly from Canada, and that my silly old cousin John, glad to have his prodigal under his wing again, is to-day killing the 'fatted calf,' and all that sort of thing, you know?"

"Is that all?" said Audrey quietly, though a close observer might have detected a suppressed eagerness in her eyes, as indicating not only an evident desire for further and more detailed information, but the evident relief that her fears were, at any rate, not far from being groundless.

"Yes," Kitty went on, artfully conscious that her listener was absorbing her tale, "Ted having arrived, it naturally follows, doesn't it, that John's usual evening engagements should be temporarily suspended, and that his little attentions to single ladies (you needn't blush, my dear! I mention no names) should be, as naturally, postponed for a day or two."

But Audrey was not to be decoyed into any demonstration of personal feeling.

The friendship between herself and Kitty Prendergast was a matter of wonder to all their friends, so different were they in every way. Perhaps it was that Kitty's irrepressible and irresistible good-humour and genuine kind-heartedness attracted the more reserved and self-contained nature of Audrey, on the principle of two negatives making a positive. It is true that Kitty's boisterous and often unrefined ways, jarred upon Audrey at times, when, not infrequently, her own thoughts were occupied with gentle if impossible dreamings; but, somehow or another, the one understood and appreciated the other, each being affectionately blind to her friend's faults and personal idiosyncracies.

Papa St. John being who and what he was, Kitty was able to do Audrey many a good turn. Being rich and a widow (since her twenty-third year), Mr. St. John's household arrangements were, more than once, indebted to her timely help, a state of things which did not trouble the old gentleman in the least, inasmuch as he was accustomed to take life as he found it and ask no questions.

It was in this spirit that Kitty, on this particular evening, cast about her to see how the domestic land lay.

"Look here, Audrey," she said, after thinking a moment, "come to Cheyne Court with me and have some supper. I've a bird, my dear! I know you enjoy birds. Your father? Oh, never mind him. He'll have had quite as much as is good for him at his club! Come along! You've got the dumps, and it's my business to cure you! There! Your foolishness, Audrey, is wonderful! and I will not have any more of it!"

"In half an hour, then, Kitty," said Audrey, and Kitty, obliged to be satisfied, went away as she had come, in a breeze and a rustle, slamming the outer door behind her till it echoed again.

But that supper never came off.

(*Concluded on page* 703.)

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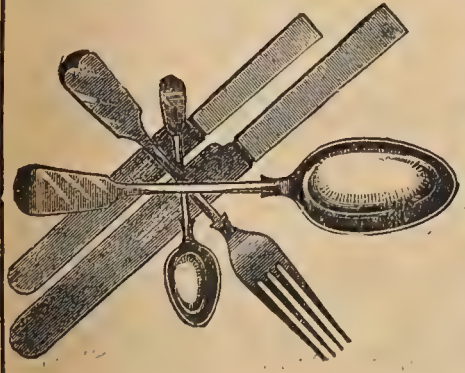

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Which thing was on this wise.

Audrey says to-day that, Kitty gone, she was conscious of some near-at-hand change, some new revolution in her life, the very uncertainty of which made her tremble with apprehension and a vague fear of the unknown.

It might have been ten minutes after Mrs. Prendergast's departure that a masterful knocking at the outer door startled Audrey out of herself.

The servant as well as the master was out, so that Audrey was forced to go to the door herself.

She looked bewildered at the tall, well set-up young fellow of about five-and-twenty, who smiled down upon her, as though perfectly sure of recognition and a welcome.

"Don't you know me?" he said, lifting his broad, soft felt hat, and thereby revealing a long-healed, purple scar, stretching almost from temple to temple.

The pale, sober-faced little woman was in no doubt now; the scar recalled memories.

"Ted! it's Ted, isn't it?" she cried, her voice sounding to herself strangely hushed and far away, for was he not John's brother—John's boy!—as the elder man ever called him.

"Yes," said Ted, and reassuringly increasing his smile. "I'm the 'bad penny!' but you'll let me come in, won't you—old Audrey?—I beg your pardon—the old name would come!"

Inside the room, and he noticed the trembling nervousness of the motionless little figure, for he had known Audrey St. John ever since he could remember.

"Surely you are not well?" he said.

"Well—well? Oh, yes! I am quite well—and—and very glad to see you, Ted."

She was coming back to everyday existence now, her eyes lighting up at the mere presence of this stalwart young reminder of something of which he, as yet, knew nothing.

Then, suddenly remembering, she begged him to run round to Cheyne Court and tell Kitty that she must not expect her till the morrow, for reasons which the person of the messenger would make her readily understand.

"Right you are!" he replied. "And I won't be a tick; for I've not only got a letter for you here from John, but lots to tell you, besides, that will make your very hair stand on end!"

This was certainly an unfortunate simile, seeing that that was about the last thing one would look for Audrey's hair to do, neatly banded down as it was in a fashion long since become old.

He tossed the letter into her lap, and went out on his mission.

When he returned and had delivered Kitty's message, he stayed on for an hour or more, chatting of his colonial experiences, the while that Audrey's hand still covered, on her lap, the as yet unread letter.

But Audrey's very anxiety to hide her joy of the possession of her treasure-letter betrayed her in the end.

By-and-by she furtively slipped the precious missive in her pocket.

Ted marvelled much at the strangely persistent way, then, in which she nursed, so to speak, her right hand.

As she bid him "good-night," she all unconsciously withdrew her hand, still holding the letter, and stretched it out to him.

Then it flashed upon her that she had made a mistake. With a burning colour that might have become the cheeks of sweet seventeen, which even made her to look the Audrey of her own girlhood, she hurriedly thrust the unopened "tell-tale" back again.

But it was too late.

Ted, shrewd and keen-witted above the average, saw and understood.

He, however, just said: "Good-night, old Audrey! (There! it's slipped out again!) See you again soon," and then she was alone, free to think, to dream, to *know*, to her heart's content.

* * * * *

On his way home Ted argued it out with himself, and arranged the whole matter to his own complete satisfaction.

"She evidently thinks all the world of John—although that's no news, for I always thought as much—while the dear old chap may be as deeply in love, without knowing it. This being so—for it is so!—it is my plain duty to both of them to wind up the clock and set it going. I wonder what the letter was about? Only an invitation perhaps for herself and papa St. John (miserable old mummy!) for next Sunday. He said he should ask her. Seems to me, though, as if she suspected something else! She couldn't *know*, for she hadn't opened the note. Anyway, I'll break ground when I get back. I've got a nice little plan, and I'll see how it works. I'll tell him to-night that she's not well, and he's sure then to call to-morrow evening to make inquiries, and if he doesn't see then how things really are, he deserves nothing but ill-luck for the remainder of his natural."

Again were the Fates against Audrey. Or were they for her?

Eight o'clock and John's knock sound together on the evening following. Papa is in and so is the servant, but Audrey prefers to open the door herself.

Again does she commit the error (if error it be) of the night before of "showing her hand," only that this time the consequences reach farther and are of deeper significance.

John sees the letter—his letter (it was, after all, but a simple invitation to dine with him and Ted on the Sunday following), and Audrey's secret is hers no longer, for he has divined it.

That he was startled at the self-revelation, cannot be denied—it could not well be otherwise—but—he sees his way; and that was all that Ted had in his mind—at least, so he admits to himself—and it is fair to suppose that he ought to know.

But, if the truth were known, John's part in the matter was not altogether that of the passively persuaded one.

Insensibly, all these years, he had been finding out his need of a woman in his home, and who but Audrey could come up to his ideal.

Half an hour after his full enlightenment he asked her to come out with him for a stroll on the Embankment.

Papa St. John was asleep, dreaming, maybe, of future club banquets.

Down by the Albert Bridge they stood, leaning on the Embankment parapet, watching the peacefulness of the river, and the dimly-defined trees of Battersea Park opposite.

"Audrey," said John, "don't you think I have been a blundering old idiot?"

"John! I don't understand?"

"No! Why, here have I been—for more years than I like to reckon—within sight and sound of Eden, and have never even tried to climb over the hedge!"

It was a mercy for Audrey that it was dark, for she certainly took to blushing again, this time furiously.

Naturally John imagined that her silence implied acquiescence.

"Well, dear," he went on, "you will have to forgive me, and, I think, had best show your forgiveness by coming as soon as possible to take care of me and Ted."

Perhaps it will be as well just to infer the nature of her answer.

Evidently it was satisfactory, for John proposed return, as it was getting late.

One thing, however, ought to be recorded.

As John walked to his own home, after leaving Audrey at her door, he made a remark to himself.

"*Ted* said she was ill; *she* says there is nothing the matter with her. I'll break every bone in the young rascal's body!"

But it is significant that he smiled as he said it, while it is certain that the threatened punishment has, as yet, never come off, nor, indeed, seems ever likely to do so.

Ralph Enderby.

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Wanted to Steer.

Clara: "When George and I are married I'm to have my own way in everything." Dora: "But you won't." Clara: "Indeed I will. That's the bargain. Don't you remember, I told you he proposed in a boat, and asked if I'd float through life with him just that way?" Dora: "Yes." Clara: "Well, he was rowing, but I was steering."

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By Madge Morris.

[*I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

I Act as Mediator.

READERS will not be surprised, seeing how many letters I receive weekly from clients, to hear of the strange coincidence I am about to tell them of. The other day a letter reached me from "WILFRED" (Ealing). He had been meeting a young lady for six months past, and they had grown very fond of each other. Then he had to go out of town, and business prevented his corresponding with her as regularly as he had done. It was not that he had grown any less fond of her, but simply that he was engaged on some important work which demanded all his time. On getting through the business he wrote to her again, but weeks elapsed, and he got no answer. The other day he was astonished, on meeting her in the street, to see her pass him by unnoticed. He writes to ask me to explain the cause of this strange conduct. Well, curiously enough, I think I am in a position to give him the correct explanation, and the authentic one, too, coming, as I believe it does, from the young lady herself, who writes to me giving her statement of the case.

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This is "NELLIE," who also writes from Ealing, and tells me that for six months she has been seeing a young man. She grew extremely fond of him, but though he was very attentive and kind to her she had the idea that he was not equally fond of her. Her friends told her that he did not really care for her, and that she had better release him from any engagement. At first she was loth to believe this, but recently, under the pretext of having business to attend to, he excused himself from seeing her for some time, when he wrote a rather cool letter. By this time she had convinced herself that the worst was true, and thought it best for both of them if she did not answer the letter, and when next she met him in the street she avoided him. Her reason for this was not that she was any less fond of him, but that she thought it better for them to part. She now wants to know if I think she is justified in what she did.

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Now, it is very clear indeed that my correspondents have misunderstood each other. As both will see on reading the other's statement of the case, neither has in the least fallen off in their affections. The reason for "WILFRED'S" seeming coolness was really pressure of business, and nothing else, and the reason for "NELLIE'S" aloofness was based on a misunderstanding of "WILFRED'S" conduct. Let them read each other's case, and make it up. Evidently both are very fond of each other, and it is with very great pleasure that I am able to act as the unconscious peacemaker between them.

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Must One be in Love?

THERE are a good many false ideas about on the subject of love, and one is that it is against nature for a man not to find himself under the spell of some young lady. "ADOLPH" is twenty-two, and for five years has constantly met girls, and accompanied them for walks and to the theatre. But all this time he has remained quite cold to their charms, though few of his friends have escaped similarly unscathed. He asks me if the reason is that there is something wrong with him that he does not fall in love.

This is quite a mistake. There is no obligation upon "ADOLPH" to fall in love with a girl. If he is philosophic enough to be able to keep his head in spite of the fair ones, it simply means that that part of his anatomy is in the ascendency over his heart.

If "ADOLF" finds life quite agreeable without love, he should be satisfied. He is quite young, and there can be no possible harm in his remaining un attached for four years or so, when, doubtless, his position in the world will have improved.

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Besides, perhaps "ADOLPH" is one of those young men who are attracted by women older than himself, and not by girls. Before persuading himself that he is loveless, let him devote his attentions to the maturer ladies, and see how he fares. If this also fails, what is to prevent his remaining a bachelor? These are very useful members of the community, and a certain percentage of men must remain unattached, just as speaking examples of man's lost condition without woman's aid and influence.

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Love versus Mammon.

AN interesting problem reaches me from "R. G." (Greenock). A young man of twenty-seven has been earning £90 a year as correspondence clerk. He was engaged to be married in a fortnight to a young lady who was formerly a typewriter in the same employ, but had resigned her position on account of her coming marriage. All arrangements had been made for the ceremony, and invitations issued, house rented and furnished, and trousseau complete. At this stage an advertisement appears in the papers for a private secretary to a gentleman, unmarried, at a handsome salary, and a probable permanency. In an idle moment the young man answers the advertisement.

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He sees the advertiser, and is offered the situation at a salary of £250, on condition that he remains single for three years. How should the young man act? He sees in this offer the chance of a lifetime, which he thinks may effectually advance his prospects in life. Should he postpone the marriage or settle down to his life as a clerk? Now, let me say a word or two about this post of private secretary. I have friends and relations who have held such positions, and can only say that they are almost impossible for young men such as the one in question. To hold such a position means that a man must absolutely devote himself to his employer, must be ready to be at his disposal at any time, even to the detriment of private engagements.

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Such a post is essentially one for a single young man, ready to postpone the "settling down" process indefinitely and to devote his whole time to his employer, and I could not counsel one engaged to a girl, and about to marry, to accept such employment. They could not devote the necessary time to each other, and married life would be transformed into anything but bliss.

Further, it would be a great injustice on the man's part to postpone his marriage under the circumstances. The remuneration would, of course, be much greater, but is he sure that in five years time his position will be as good as it would probably be if he remains in a commercial office? I think not. For a man without family or matrimonial ties, or one anxious to start in a profession, these secretaryships are excellent, but for those with responsibilities they have little to recommend them.

I advise my correspondent to stick to his employment, and try and make a position for himself in his own sphere of life, and not to think of such ventures as this, even though at first they seem to be very promising. When he is actually engaged, and about to marry the girl of his choice, to throw her up to catch at an imaginary chance of prosperity would be a very ungenerous thing to do.

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